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Visitors to Korea are often struck by the displays of religion all around them. Buddhist temples are the most colorful, but Confucian shrines, including gravesites, are also visible throughout the countryside. And in city and country, Christian churches are found within every three or four blocks. Buddhism, Confucianism, and Christianity are apparent to the casual visitor, but if one knows how to find it, a shaman house or office is also easy to find. This book will visit the famous and the typical sacred sites of the four major traditions—Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity, and Shamanism—as well as other religions.

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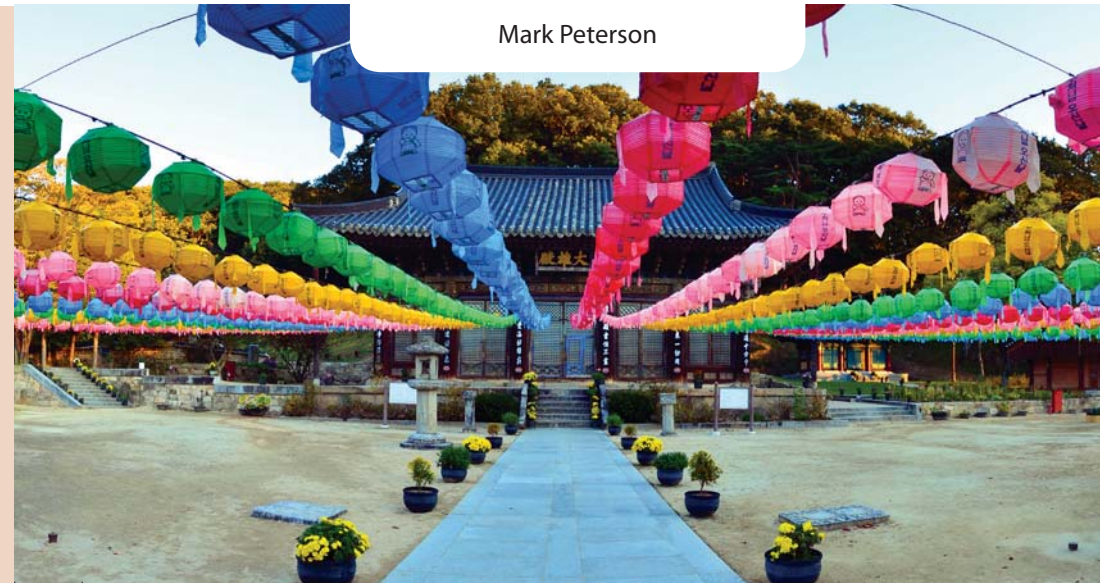


Understanding Korea No. 6

KOREA'S
RELIGIOUS PLACES

KOREA'S RELIGIOUS PLACES

Mark Peterson



 한국학중앙연구원
THE ACADEMY OF KOREAN STUDIES

About the series

The Understanding Korea Series aims to share a variety of original and fascinating aspects of Korea with those overseas who are engaged in education or are deeply interested in Korean culture.

This is part of the Understanding Korea Project, which the Academy of Korean Studies has been carrying out to propagate an understanding of Korean society, history, and culture to every corner of the world.

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Korea's Religious Places

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FOREWORD

For nearly four decades, the Academy of Korean Studies has taken great effort to preserve and create national culture by helping to shape the future direction of Korea through meaningful research and education about Korean culture. One of its ambitious projects has been the Understanding Korea Project, aimed at propagating an understanding of knowledge about Korea and Korean culture abroad.

The Understanding Korea Series, published annually as part of the Understanding Korea Project, has shared unique and interesting information about Korean culture and society with those overseas, such as educators and the like, who are engaged in the study of culture.

The topic of this issue, the sixth in the Understanding Korea Series, is Korea's religious places. Traditionally, a variety of religions have coexisted in Korea under the nation's special cultural background of mutual respect. This series will help readers grasp various aspects of religious space unique to Korea. I hope that this book will provide those overseas who are interested in Korea, such as educators, with a chance to acquire useful information.

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to those who have made efforts to publish this series, including Professor Mark Arlen Peterson from Brigham Young University; Kim Hyeon, director of the Center for International Affairs at the Academy, who carried out the Understanding Korea Project; and Kim Hyunggeun, president of Seoul Selection, the publishing house for this series. Thank you so much.

LEE Bae Yong

President, Academy of Korean Studies

INTRODUCTION

Visitors to Korea are often struck by the displays of religion all around them. Buddhist temples are the most colorful, and often find their way onto calendars and tourist brochures. But Confucian shrines, including gravesites, are also visible throughout the countryside. And in city and country, Christian churches are found within every three or four blocks, which at night are revealed by lighted crosses. Buddhism, Confucianism, and Christianity are apparent to the casual visitor, but if one knows how to find it, a shaman house or office is also easy to find. This book will visit the famous and the typical sacred sites of the four major traditions—Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity, and Shamanism—as well as other religions.

This book examines Korean religion from its visual manifestations. We will examine the major religious sites and explore the significance of each. In the process, we will highlight the important aspects of the religion, particularly as it is revealed architecturally and symbolically in the important religious sites that we will visit on the pages of this book.

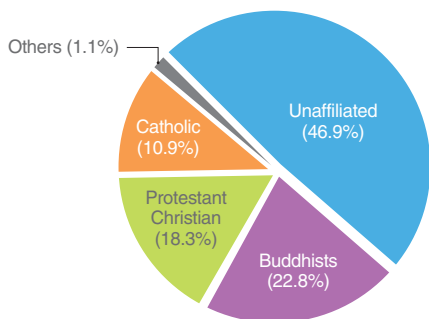
Perhaps the most iconic image of Korean religion, perhaps of all Korean culture, is Bulguksa Temple (*-sa* means temple), particularly the front steps and the arches over symbolic rivers that support the staircases. If not the front steps of Bulguksa Temple, it might be the man-made stone grotto that enshrines a Buddha image, called Seokguram Grotto, which is administratively a part of Bulguksa Temple, but is located high on the hill overlooking the famous temple grounds. These images of this famous Buddhist temple—the name of which means “Temple of the Buddha Land”—and many other Buddhist images would give the impression that Buddhism is the dominant religion of Korea.

In terms of iconography, indeed, Buddhism is dominant, but in terms

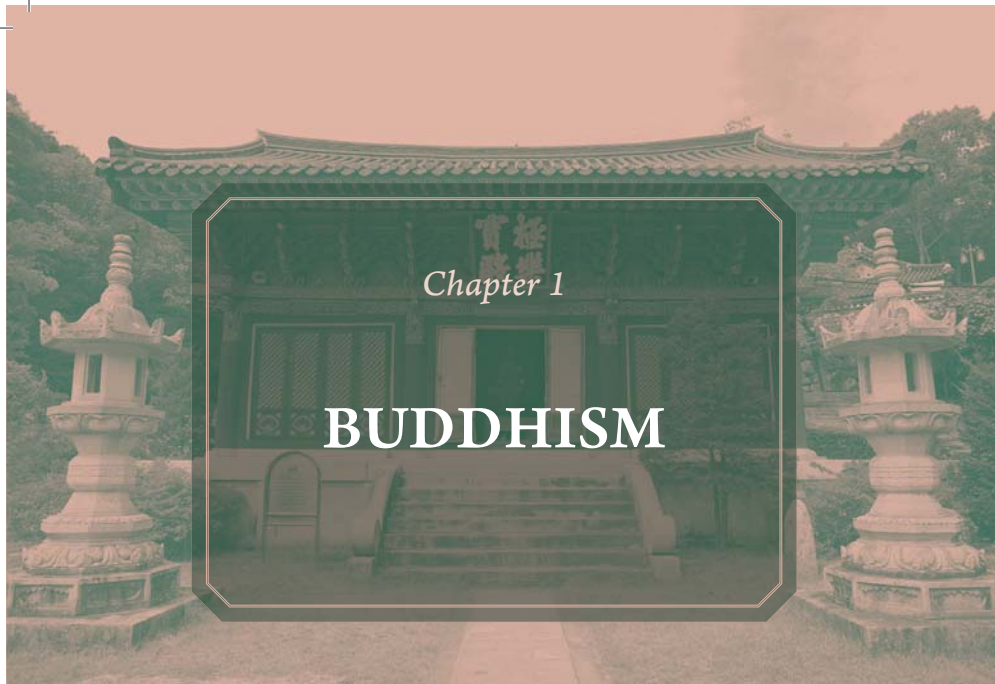
of numbers of adherents, Buddhism is rivaled by Christianity. Yet, in another sense, both are outnumbered by adherents of Confucianism and Shamanism. All four major traditions have religious places, but some are more obvious while others are more subtle and harder to find. The types of locations and their structures are different for each of these four major traditions. This book will help you to see the obvious structures (Buddhist and Christian buildings are in this category) and the less obvious (including Confucian sites, and the truly hard-to-find Shamanistic sites).

There is always a debate about whether one should consider Confucianism a religion. Polls taken by government agencies and private companies indicate that as little as 1 percent of the people claim Confucianism as their *religion*, and that says that Confucianism is indeed a religion to that sector of society. But in a larger sense, Confucianism is *believed*, or more accurately stated, Confucian social mores and ancestor ceremonies are *practiced* by a large percentage of the people. Levels of language showing respect for seniors, and ethics classes taught in school bear elements of Confucianism that affect all of society. Those who argue that Confucianism is not a religion say that it is a philosophy or a set

of ethics. They also point out that there is no god figure in Confucianism. Indeed, Confucius and his disciples were more political consultants than they were preachers. Confucius and Mencius left records of their discussions with kings and other political leaders, where they spoke of morality and social responsibilities.



Statistics on Religion by Population in Korea
(Source: KOSIS Database)



Chapter 1

BUDDHISM

Buddhist temples in Korea are older than the structures of the rival Confucianism, and of course, much older than Christian buildings. Buddhist temples date mostly from the Unified Silla period (668–935). Some are newer, dating from the Goryeo period (918–1392), but there are many that go back to the Three Kingdoms period (57 BCE–668 CE). Buddhist temples are by far the most colorful religious buildings and often the most popular tourist sites in Korea. They are set in beautiful mountains, which, if one understands Buddhism, are part of the temple grounds. Indeed, the Buddhist conception of heaven is a mountain, so it is only appropriate that mountains and earth are sacred space. The temple is only the center of the space; the whole mountain is sacred.

Architecturally, Buddhist temples are the most attractive of the

religious sites in Korea. Throughout Korea there are large, colorful buildings that are easily identified as Buddhist temples. The most dramatic are arrayed in large compounds typically located in beautiful mountain valleys. For example, perhaps the most iconic of the Buddhist temple compounds is Bulguksa Temple, on the outskirts of Gyeongju. The compound is in the lower reaches of a mountain, Mt. Tohamsan, and has several buildings and remote hermitages, the most famous of which is Seokguram Grotto, which holds a ten-foot-tall granite carving of the historical Buddha. Photographs of the temple, its staircases in the front of the complex, and the stone image of Seokguram Grotto are some of the most photographed images in Korea, and often find their way onto tourist brochures and calendars.

Boriam Temple on Mt. Geumsan, Namhae





Bulguksa Temple (top), Seokguram Grotto, Gyeongju

Bulguksa Temple may be the most visited and most photographed of the Buddhist temples, but there is a special category of three temples that are considered the “Three Jewel” temples of Korea. The *three jewels* is a reference to the core concepts of Buddhism, which are the Buddha, the dharma (the law or doctrine), and the sangha (the monastery and the monks). Tongdosa Temple is the temple of the Buddha, and this is revealed in that the main hall does not have an image, but rather has a large window that looks out on a small pagoda that holds one of the jewels from the cremation of the historic Buddha, Shakyamuni, who was the prince Siddhartha Gautama of India. Haeinsa Temple, where the 80,000 wooden printing blocks used to print the Buddhist scripture are located, is the temple of the dharma. Songgwangsa Temple, the largest monastery that specializes in training monks, is the temple of the sangha.

Characteristics: A Who’s Who at a Buddhist Temple

Major Buddhist temples have multiple buildings, each dedicated to a specific Buddhist image. A larger temple complex will typically have a building for most, if not all, of the following: Shakyamuni (Seokgamoni), Amitabha (Amita), Vairocana (Birojana), Maitreya (Mireuk), Avalokiteshvara (Gwanseeum), and the mountain god (*sansin*, as *san* means mountain and *sin* means god). Sometimes there are halls dedicated to other Buddhist figures. At the entrance to the temple complex there is often a building that is also a gate that houses the *Four Heavenly Kings*, but they are in reality guardians of the four directions. There is also a structure, with only a roof but

open on the sides, that houses the *four percussion instruments* that are rung or struck at dawn and at sunset, and in some places at midday.

These are the main features at most temple complexes. Let us examine each in a generic sense and propose a kind of template that will contain much of what is found at a Buddhist temple, and then when we look at the major Buddhist temples, we can plug each element of the temple into this template.

The hall dedicated to Shakyamuni is the main hall at most temples, although some temples will feature Amitabha or Vairocana as the figure in the main hall, and a few will have Maitreya. If the hall is dedicated to Shakyamuni, the hall is titled the “hall of the great hero” (*daeungjeon*). Sometimes there are three figures in the main hall, and sometimes there are five or seven. At times, the three major Buddhas will be flanked by two or four bodhisattvas.

If there is a hall for Amitabha, the hall will be titled the “hall of extreme bliss” (*geungnakjeon*). The hall for Vairocana is often simply

Daeungjeon Halls at Ssanggyesa Temple, Hadong (left), Seonunsa Temple, Gochang



called the “hall of Vairocana” (*birojeon*).

A Buddha can often be identified by the particular mudra, or hand sign, that he uses. For example, Shakyamuni will often be depicted touching his knee with his fingers extended so that they almost touch the ground, to symbolize that he is calling on the earth to witness that he is the enlightened one—indeed, that is the meaning of Buddha. In Korea, Vairocana is usually seen holding his right hand cupped around the extended finger of the left hand, or with his right hand covering the row of knuckles of his left hand. This is called either the *wisdom fist* or the *union of male and female principles*.

Bodhisattvas are usually standing, whereas Buddha images are seated. Avalokiteshvara (Gwaneum or Gwanseeum), perhaps the most-seen bodhisattva, is usually depicted standing and wearing an elaborate crown, and is often depicted with multiple additional heads, miniature heads on the crown of his head. The bodhisattva is often shown in an eleven-faced form or a thousand-handed form.

Geungnakjeon Halls at Eunjeoksa Temple, Yeosu (left), Yongguksa Temple, Uiryeong





Left: A Buddha can often be identified by the particular mudra, or hand sign.
Right: Haesugwaneumsang (Goddess of Mercy) at Naksansa Temple, Yangyang

He also has necklaces and lacey robes. Because of the dress and jewelry, and also the idea that this bodhisattva is known for being merciful and good for answering prayers, many assume that *she* is a woman—“Goddess of Mercy,” she is often called. Historically, this Bodhisattva was Avalokiteshvara, a man. But through the process of becoming a bodhisattva, and taking on the mission of alleviating suffering and answering prayers, he has become female in popular Buddhism because compassion and mercy were conceptualized as female traits in Asia. In an ideal doctrinal sense, Buddhas and bodhisattvas are gender neutral or, rather, have transcended gender distinctions.

Every large-scale temple in Korea has a building that serves as a kind of gatehouse, containing the Four Heavenly Kings. In most cases, they are free-standing statues, often larger than life, in the ten-foot-tall range. They are not exactly the same from temple to temple.



Left: Sacheonwangmun (Gate of the Four Heavenly Kings) at Pyochungsa Temple, Miryang. Right: Sacheonwang (Four Heavenly Kings) at Sinheungsa Temple, Sokcho

Each temple has its own artisans who carve the statues according to their own interpretations, but there are major features for each of the four guardians that signify who they are and which direction—north, south, east, west—they represent.

The north is the Heavenly King Vaisravana (Damun), “he who hears everything,” who holds a spear in one hand and a small pagoda in the other. He tends to have dark skin, either black or blue. The south is Heavenly King Virudhaka (Jeungjang), “he who causes growth,” who holds a sword and is light-skinned. The east is Heavenly King Dhritarashtra (Jiguk), “he who upholds the realm,” who holds a lute and is light-skinned. And the west is Heavenly King Virupaksa (Gwangmok), “he who sees everything,” who holds a dragon in one hand and a jewel in the other. He tends to be dark-skinned.

Each of these deities has a history that not only goes deep in Buddhism, but also has connections with Hinduism, both of which

developed simultaneously from Vedic beliefs and traditions in early India. In Hinduism, for example, the deity of the north, Vaisravana, is associated with Kubera, who in an early incarnation as a mortal was a wealthy mill-owner who was known for his wealth, but also for his generosity to the poor.

Inside a temple complex, there is a roofed building without walls that houses the four percussion instruments: the drum, the gong, the wooden fish clapper, and the bell. These are rung twice a day in some temples—morning and evening—and three times a day in others, with a short performance before lunch. First is the drum. The monks take turns beating on the drum and each performer has a slightly different rhythm or nuance. The drum skin is from two cattle, one on each side of the drum; one from a cow and one from a bull, and each had to have died naturally. The drum is beaten to call all living



Left: Drum (*beopgo*) and wooden fish clapper (*mogeon*) at Buseoksa Temple, Yeongju
Right: Bell (*beomjong*) at Hwaeomsa Temple, Gurye

beings of the land to worship the Buddha. The wooden fish has a hollowed-out inside where the monks rattle their wooden sticks. This is to call all the creatures of the waters to worship. Then, the monks beat on the gong; its high-pitched clang calls the creatures of the air to worship. With land, water, and air taken care of, what is the bell for? When the bell sounds its deep mellow tone, the tormentors in hell have to pause and give relief to those they are assigned to torment—the residents of hell who are serving terms of punishment prior to being reborn to see if they can get it right this time.

The historic Buddha of our epoch (the word in Sanskrit is *kalpa*, roughly an immeasurable period of time during which a high mountain is worn down into a flat plain) is Shakyamuni. As a young man, he was raised in a palace and led a pampered life. Leaving the palace one day he was surprised to see the things his parents were keeping from him—poverty, illness, old age, and death. The reality of his discovery bothered him and he wanted to understand the meaning of these things, but his protective parents barred him from leaving the palace. Miraculously, to leave the palace and begin his search for enlightenment, he flew over the palace walls on his horse, with his servant riding horseback as well.

Out in the world, he tried to discover the *way* through fasting and asceticism, but that didn't work. Finally, while meditating under a peepal tree (the Bodhi tree or sacred fig), he achieved enlightenment, and understood the Four Noble Truths, to wit: life is suffering, suffering is caused by desires (or attachment), it is possible to overcome suffering, and it is done by following the Noble Eightfold Path. These four truths became the foundational doctrine of Buddhism.





Painting of Buddha Shakyamuni
at Naesosa Temple, Buan

On his way to enlightenment, the historical Buddha encountered temptations and subjugated the god of illusion, Mara. One of the stories of his overcoming temptation has to do with the temptations of the flesh. Mara's daughters, three beautiful women, one with a flute, one with a lute, and one singing try to lure him to tarry with them, but he rejects their temptations, and then their beautiful faces fall off, and they are

revealed as demons who had only been masquerading as the pleasures of the flesh.

The Buddha was transformed. This transformation is marked in paintings at many temples showing Shakyamuni, now with a halo and the serene look of one who has attained enlightenment. He begins his teaching and attracts disciples. There are many narratives of this phase of his life involving miracles and other manifestations that the Shakyamuni was really a Buddha. When he was cremated, jewels cascaded from the funeral bier, and thus started the tradition of sifting through the ashes of a monk after he dies and is cremated to find jewels.

Such jewels have a special name and devotional practice associated with them. They are called *sari*, or relics of the body of the Buddha, and are kept in a *sariham*—in Korean, a case for the relics. The case is then enclosed in a capsule that is enclosed in the base of



a pagoda, or a small stone tower. This is the Korean practice. It has its roots in the stupa of India, often a mere earthen mound; sometimes the earthen mound is covered in stone. In China, pagodas can be very tall—multistoried towers often made of brick. In Japan, the archetypal pagoda is made of wood, again often a multi-storied, tall building. Korea has had tall pagodas made of wood, and there are some made of brick, or stone cut to look like the brick of China, but the archetypal pagoda is made of stone and is typically only ten to fifteen feet tall.

Indeed, there is a pagoda in the main courtyard, of the several courtyards, at a temple complex. The main courtyard is in front of the dharma hall (*beopdang*), of which there is only one at each temple. The dharma hall is the center of the worship at the temple; it is there that the community of resident monks at the temple will meet all together for worship twice a day—at the beginning of the day, before sunrise, and at the end of the day. All the monks meet



A stupa at Jeokmyeolbogung Shrine of Tongdosa Temple, Yangsan (left)
East Five-story Stone Pagoda of Hwaomsa Temple, Gurye

in the dharma hall to chant and bow, sometimes performing the ritual of the 108 bows, one for each of the foolish things or *sins* of mankind.

Bulguksa Temple (Gyeongju, Gyeongsangbuk-do)

Bulguksa Temple is a beautiful temple in an exquisite setting. The temple complex has five major halls, ancillary buildings, and gates. Bulguksa Temple is reached by passing through the main gate on the south side of the complex. Along the path of several hundred meters there is a gatehouse for the guardians of the four directions.

As we proceed into the temple compound, we see two beautiful sets of staircases. The main hall in this temple is reached up the stairs to the right, to the east. The smaller staircase to the west leads to the hall of Amitabha (Amita). Behind these two halls are halls dedicated to the bodhisattva of compassion Avalokiteshvara (Gwanseeum), the cosmic Buddha Vairocana, and a hall for the Buddha's disciples. Let us look at each of these five archetypal halls at Bulguksa Temple, for similar halls are found at other temples.

At Bulguksa Temple, there are two pagodas in the courtyard in front of the main hall. The more attractive one is the Pagoda of Many Treasures (Dabotap Pagoda, National Treasure no. 20). There are several levels of treasures designated by the government (National Treasure is highest, Treasure is second, and third are local area designated treasures). The pagoda is made of stone cut to resemble wood. There are handrails crafted as long, thin cylinders resembling natural wooden poles used in a handrail or balustrade. The rooflines sweep up as if made of wood like those of the temple buildings in the



Dabotap (front) and Three-story Stone Pagodas at Bulguksa Temple

compound. The beauty of this pagoda is captured on the KRW 10 coin in circulation today.

The other pagoda, Shakyamuni Pagoda (Three-story Stone Pagoda, National Treasure no. 21) is a three-story stone pagoda in classic Korean style. On the inside, however, is something unique. Inside each pagoda is a box or container preserving the relics of the Buddha and other treasures to empower the pagoda. In 1966, after thieves attempted to break into the pagoda, the monks discovered a dharani-sutra, what was then the oldest printed paper in the world. Printed sometime before the dedication of the temple complex in 751, the dharani-sutra is a long scroll 6.5 meters long, but only about 6.5 centimeters wide, printed from a set of wooden printing blocks.

These two magnificent pagodas are in the courtyard of the main hall dedicated to Shakyamuni. The hall is titled “Hall of the Great Hero” (Daeungjeon Hall). The smaller staircase, to the west, leads

to a secondary courtyard and hall titled the “Hall of Extreme Bliss” (Geungnakjeon Hall). This is the hall of Amitabha (Amita), the Buddha of the Pure Land in the West.

Amitabha is the most popular Buddha in East Asia. A scripture says that when he was a bodhisattva, he vowed that he would not become a Buddha unless he succeeded in keeping forty-eight vows. One of his vows was to save anyone who called on his name for ten moments of thought. What an easy practice! This led to a widespread practice of fervently chanting Amitabha's name to assure deliverance in his Pure Land in the West.

There is a third Buddha who is also found at Korean temples, Vairocana. His role in the Buddhist pantheon is that of the central cosmic Buddha. There are innumerable Buddhas, and this Buddha is the source of them all.

In the back row, then, the Vairocana Hall is in the center and to its right, behind the main hall, is a hall to Avalokiteshvara, the most popular of all bodhisattvas. Bodhisattvas, by definition, make vows not to enter Nirvana until all living beings—including humans, animals, and hungry ghosts—are liberated from the cycle of rebirth and death. A bodhisattva is an approachable figure to whom people can pray and have some assurance of assistance. Avalokiteshvara, “he who hears the cries of the world,” is often called the “Goddess of Mercy” in East Asia. The hall dedicated to Avalokiteshvara is one of the most visited at the temple complex. Behind the statue of Avalokiteshvara at Bulguksa Temple is a painting showing the bodhisattva in thousand-hand form with eleven faces. Each hand has an eye in its palm, and the hands on the outer circle also hold an

implement of one kind or another—each showing that the bodhisattva has power and ability. If a parent is praying that a child will pass an exam, there is a hand with a brush, offering help on the test. If the prayer is for something that can be helped with money, there is a hand with money. If the prayer is to repair something broken, there is a hammer. Each hand has an implement that shows different ways that the bodhisattva can answer prayers. The symbolism of the eleven faces is that the bodhisattva observes the cries of living beings coming from all directions.

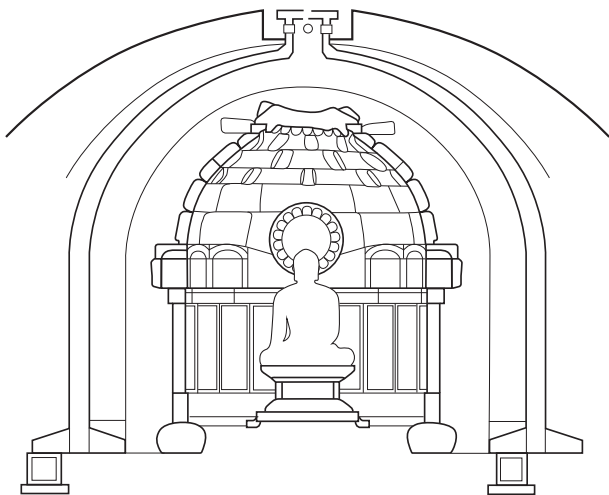
In the back row of the temple complex to the left there is one more important hall for prayers. Currently it is a hall of disciples, depicting a dozen or so people from the time of Shakyamuni wearing different clothes to show that they are people from varying walks of life. But before 1984, it was the hall of the mountain god (*sansin*). The mountain god is the most popular folk deity in Korea. Most large temple complexes have a hall for the mountain god located to the rear of the compound and to the left. Buddhism tends to adopt and adapt native religious beliefs wherever it spreads.

Seokguram Grotto (Gyeongju, Gyeongsangbuk-do)

The highlight of the visit to Bulguksa Temple is nearly three kilometers away, up the hill, and on the far side of the ridge that will lead you to where you can see the East Sea in the distance. Near the crest of the hill looking eastward, inside a man-made cave, sits a ten-foot-tall Buddha carved from a single piece of granite. It would have been impossible to carve the Buddha and move him into the cave; rather, the cave was built around the Buddha.

Buddhist images are associated with caves for a good reason. Buddhism began in India and spread to China via the Silk Road where, amid dangers of thieves and the terrain itself, Buddhas and bodhisattvas functioned as great protective spirits. Along the Silk Road, caves were associated with places of safety for staying overnight, and to increase the safety of such caves they often featured a local deity, or a protective deity. Over the centuries, the appeal and power of Buddhism won out over the local gods. It was cosmopolitan and appealed to people from West Asia to East Asia, from Central Asia to China, to Korea, to Japan. Thus, a Buddha in a cave was one of the first images that came to Korea, and Seokguram Grotto is the finest expression of that sentiment. In effect, Seokguram Grotto is the last stop on the Silk Road as it looks out to the East Sea from the

The Great Stone Buddha in Seokguram Grotto (left) and its rendering of interior



southeastern part of Korea before it ends in the ocean.

The Buddha in Seokguram Grotto is a classic image that shows several of the bodily marks of a true Buddha in the Tang Dynasty style that became widely popular in East Asia. These include the tuft of white hair between the eyebrows, an extended lump on the top of the head, knots of hair on the head, extended earlobes, three rings on his neck, a robe hung over the left shoulder, androgynous breasts, his hands in the position of one of the prescribed mudras, a lotus imprint on the palms of his hands and on the bottoms of his feet, as he sits in a cross-legged lotus position on a lotus pedestal. The Buddha is a classic image, but there is some degree of confusion about who he is. His mudra with his right hand on his knee and his fingers almost touching the earth is the mudra of *calling on earth to witness* that he is the Buddha. This mudra suggests that he is Shakyamuni, the historic Buddha. However, the perfectly mathematical structure of the grotto suggests that the main Buddha is the Vairocana of the Hwaecom Order, which was popular in the Silla court. The fact that an image of Avalokiteshvara is prominent among the carvings on the wall surrounding the Buddha would indicate that the image is Amitabha. It might be that the artisan, Kim Dae-seong, intentionally blended symbols together, a characteristic of the Hwaecom Order. Work on the grotto-temple ended with the death of the architect Kim Dae-seong in 774.

The remodeling in the 1960s brought new access to Seokguram Grotto. Whereas traditionally a believer had to hike the 2.2 kilometers up the hill to appreciate the cave, now there is a road switching back and forth up the hill for tour buses to make the trip easily. From

the parking lot, the last half-mile hike to the cave is on a level path wide enough to accommodate hundreds of tourists and school-children on their field trips. Only the last segment requires hiking now, and that is up a set of stone steps the equivalent of maybe a three- or four-story building. Once, the pilgrimage was part of the experience. Now, it is the great number of visitors that marks the visit to Seokguram Grotto.

Before the construction of the new road and trail, pilgrims could enter the cave, circumnavigate the beautiful stone image, and even reach up and touch him. Now, the cave is closed off from visitors by a glass window; visitors stand outside the actual cave, in an antechamber, where they can view the Buddha only from a distance.

Haeinsa Temple (Hapcheon, Gyeongsangnam-do)

The key feature of Haeinsa Temple, the temple of the “Ocean-Seal Absorption,” is the 80,000 wooden printing blocks used to print the complete Buddhist scripture, in English called the *Tripitaka Koreana*. Not only are the 80,000 wood blocks a UNESCO World Heritage Treasure, but the building that houses the printing blocks is also unique. There are two parallel buildings designed specifically to house the woodblocks; in each one, the south-facing wall has large windows on the upper section and small windows on the lower section. By windows, we mean openings with protective wooden slats that allow air to circulate. On the north-facing walls, the opposite is the case: there are small windows on the top and large windows on the bottom. This configuration enables air to circulate naturally and helps to preserve the woodblocks.



Irrespective of the science surrounding the creation of the storehouse for the 80,000 printing blocks for the *Tripitaka Koreana*, the visit to the temple is an inspiration for Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike. The temple itself is located on the high slopes of Mt. Gayasan. About 100 meters below where the stairs of the temple begin there is a gate. This gate has the name of the mountain and the name of the temple on it—Gayasan Haeinsa. It's always that format: *-san* means mountain, and *-sa* means temple. Temples are part of the mountain and the mountain is part of the temple. This gate has no walls. We do not leave the secular world behind all at once; we progress deeper into the sacred in segments through a series of gates.

After passing through the gate of the Four Heavenly Kings, we climb more stairs and cross another gate, called either the *haetalmun*, “gate of separation from the world,” or the *burimun*, “gate of

Haeinsa Temple and the reenactment of the procession to transport the *Tripitaka Koreana*



non-duality,” to find ourselves in the lower courtyard. To the left we see the elevated platform housing the four percussion instruments: the drum, the gong, the fish, and the bell, each rung in succession to call all living beings to worship.

After more stairs and another gate, we ascend to the main courtyard. Here is the pagoda that tells us we are in the main compound. But here, unlike most temples, we have to climb a set of stairs, a rather long and steep set, but here there is no gate at the top.

The main hall on the north end of the compound here is dedicated to Vairocana, who displays the *wisdom fist* mudra. Here at this temple where the Tripitaka is stored and protected, one would think this should be Shakyamuni, but Vairocana, the Buddha symbolizing the universe, as it is, who is accessible through the Ocean-Seal Absorption, is the main Buddha of this temple associated with the Hwaeom Order. The temple's connection with Vairocana predates the carving of the blocks. As for that matter, the blocks were not

Left: Jeongjungtap Pagoda and Daeungjeon Hall (behind) of Haeinsa Temple
Right: The *Tripitaka Koreana*



carved here; rather, they were carved at a temple on Ganghwado Island, perhaps at Jeondeungsa Temple.

The carving of the texts is a highly technical matter, beginning with the kind of wood to be selected. Birch and cherry wood are the favorites. Then the wood has to be aged so that it won't twist and warp as years go by. The timber is first soaked in salt water for three years; then, set out to dry for three years before they begin cutting the blocks and ultimately carving them. The carving process begins when a piece of paper, lined and filled in with text, usually handwritten, is pasted on the wood face down, and all but the letters of the paper are cut away, leaving a reverse image for printing.

An interesting footnote to one's visit to Haeinsa Temple can be found as one leaves the upper courtyard. The traffic pattern takes visitors over to the west side of the compound to leave. To work one's way back to the main courtyard and to leave the temple, one goes past an old tree on a rise off the side of the main path. There is a plaque that explains that this tree grew out of the walking staff of Choe Chi-won (857–d. after 908). The story of Choe is remarkable. He left for China as a youth, where he studied the Confucian classics and passed the Tang Dynasty civil service exam. The exam is a recruiting device for government officials, and Choe served the Tang court. He returned to his native Silla in his prime and made himself available for a position. Having served in the Tang government, he should have been a good candidate for an important position in the Silla Kingdom, but such was not the case because political power in the Silla Kingdom was dominated by nobles of high birth. Frustrated, he finally left Gyeongju, the Silla capital, and retired to Haeinsa



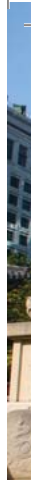
Temple. Choe Chi-won's tree is a symbol of both the frustration of a rejected Confucian scholar, and the fact that at least at one level, there is a comfortable harmony of Buddhism and Confucianism in Korea. One final note before we leave Choe Chi-won: we should note that later on, when the Confucians decided to name sages, and they eventually named eighteen sages (to keep up with the sixteen Chinese sages and the four disciples, all together with Confucius, himself) to be honored in the national academy and in every county school in Korea, Choe was the second sage honored.

Jogyesa Temple (Seoul)

The headquarters temple for almost all of Korea is the Jogyesa Temple in downtown Seoul. There are several sects of Buddhism in Korea, but the dominant sect is called the Jogye Order (Jogyejong). The present-day Jogye Order is the standard-bearer for celibate Buddhism in Korea.

This temple goes back to the founding of the Joseon Dynasty and its move to Seoul in 1394. The temple was enlarged in 1910 at the beginning of the Japanese colonial era. There is Natural Monument no. 9, a large lacebark pine tree on the compound. It was planted by a traveler who brought it back from China, and is over 500 years old. Many temples have well-preserved and noteworthy trees and other plants on the compound. This speaks to the harmony of nature and religion—true of Confucianism and Shamanism as well as Buddhism in Korea.

Surrounding the entrance to Jogyesa Temple, on the main road of Anguk-dong in the heart of Seoul, are various shops selling Buddhist





Jogyesa Temple

articles including clothes for monks and various images and other things for Buddhist worship. Often it is not only Buddhists who would buy such articles for temples and private worship—Shamans also like Buddhist images and artifacts to equip their Shaman shrines. The harmony of Shamanism and Buddhism is one of the main features of Korean religion.

Across the street from the entrance to Jogyesa Temple is a building housing administrative offices for the Jogye Order. There, one can arrange a temple stay at most of the temples nationwide. In recent years, the practice of staying overnight at a Buddhist temple has grown in popularity. Temples, by their nature, welcome sojourners. This has long been the case, but in recent years, temples have organized temple stays for foreigners and Koreans alike, where one can stay one night, or several nights, and experience a taste of monastic life at a temple.

Tongdosa Temple (Yangsang, Gyeongsangnam-do)

North of Busan, deep in a mountain valley is Tongdosa Temple, one of the “Three Jewel” temples, the temple of the Buddha. Here,

there is a small pagoda that houses a relic of the historical Buddha Shakyamuni. One of the many jewels, *sarira*, that cascaded from his cremated funeral bier was brought to Korea and given to Tongdosa Temple by its founder, the Silla monk Jajang (d. ca 658) in 646. Because this is the temple of the Buddha, rather than having an image of the Buddha in the main hall, there is a window, a long oblong opening in the wall, that looks out at the Adamantine Precepts Platform (Geumgang Gyedan, Ordination Platform) that houses the relic of the Buddha in a pagoda-like structure on the top of the precepts platform.

The main worship hall, the Hall of the Great Hero (Daeungjeon Hall), has been designated a National Treasure—no. 290, one of the more recent designations. The absence of any image of Buddhas and bodhisattvas in the main hall is remarkable for this temple. Everything centers on the Adamantine Precepts Platform, with a



Geumgang Ordination Platform at Tongdosa Temple

pagoda-like structure on the platform in the shape of an overturned cauldron, in which is enshrined the relic of the historical Buddha. At the morning and evening rituals, the monks face the Adamantine Precepts Platform, whereas at all other temples, the monks face the images of one or more Buddhas and often a set of bodhisattvas. Therefore, the atmosphere at Tongdosa Temple is different from that of all other temples. Indeed, Tongdosa means to save the world through the mastery of the Way to enlightenment.

The setting of Tongdosa Temple is like that of the other two jewel temples—Haeinsa Temple, the jewel of the dharma (the Buddhist teachings), and Songgwangsa Temple, the jewel of the sangha (the monastic community). All three are located several kilometers ascent into a canyon, with a beautiful and powerful stream running alongside the path to the temple. Tongdosa Temple occupies many acres of mountainside, including farmland that is farmed by the monks for the sustenance of the monks and visitors.

A temple stay at Tongdosa Temple includes an opportunity to partake of *temple food*—all vegetarian—in the way monks do, using the *four bowls*. Monks will partake of their meals, breakfast, lunch, and dinner, in a common room where they sit on the floor, all facing the center of the room. A team of monks will serve the food that each monk will put in the four bowls—one for rice, one for soup, one for various vegetables, and one for water. On a signal, three claps of a split bamboo stick slapped against one's hand, all will eat. No food is wasted. Using the water in the water bowl, the bowls are rinsed out, dried with a cloth, and then set on the shelf ready for the next meal. Simplicity is the key word for the meal and for all monastic life.

Beopjusa Temple (Boeun, Chungcheongbuk-do)

On the slopes of sacred Mt. Songnisan, which literally means “separated from the secular or mundane world,” not far from Cheongju, sits a beautiful temple complex called Beopjusa Temple. Dating from the Silla period, it has several National Treasures, including National Treasure no. 5, the Twin Lion Stone Lantern, a stone lantern supported by two lions standing on their back legs. There is also a tall wooden pagoda that is five stories tall (pagodas are always an odd number of stories tall): National Treasure no. 55, the Palsangjeon Wooden Pagoda.

There is a stately old pine tree there that is called Songni Jeongipumsong Pine Tree (the Pine Tree of Government Rank Senior 2). Ranks were only given to officials in the government, starting with a junior nine rank, then working up through senior nine, junior eight, senior eight, on up to senior one rank. For a pine tree to be a senior two rank is very high. There is a story. When King Sejo (r. 1455–1468) traveled to Beopjusa Temple on a royal excursion in 1464, as he passed by, the tree branches bowed to his carriage chair. He stopped and got off the carriage, whereupon the branches of the tree rose up, as if to offer protection as he approached. He was so impressed with the loyalty and dignity of the tree that he promoted it on the spot to the second rank in the government! It is the only tree, in fact the only non-human, to ever be so honored.

Beopjusa Temple is a temple dedicated to the spirit of Maitreya, the future Buddha. Most temples feature one of the three as the primary Buddha: Shakyamuni, Amitabha, or Vairocana, but here the main figure is the Buddha of the future, Maitreya. Buddhist tradi-





Daeungbojeon Hall (left), Buddha for National Unification at Beopjusa Temple

tions teach that not only is Maitreya a Buddha yet to come, but he represents hope for those in this life as well.

The temple was founded in 553 by a monk named Uisin, who founded it after returning from a trip to China. The temple name, Beopju, means “where the dharma abides” because the temple once housed the manuscripts or sutras that Uisin brought back from China.

As a temple devoted to Maitreya, the Buddha of the future, there is also a new magnificent representation of Maitreya there. In addition to the ancient image, there is a modern golden Buddha image that was placed there in 1990 and is called the Buddha for National Unification. It is thirty-three meters tall and covered in eighty kilograms of gold leaf.

Magoksa Temple (Gongju, Chungcheongnam-do)

Located in Chungcheongnam-do, near Gongju, Magoksa Temple dates back to the Three Kingdom period (traditional dates 57 BCE–668 CE) and is surrounded by mountains and rivers. Its setting is not only beautiful, but somewhat inaccessible; and thus, this temple was one of the few not destroyed by the Japanese during the Imjin War of 1592–1598. Most other temples were destroyed and had to be rebuilt after the war, and often at temples, there were fires that destroyed buildings. Some temple complexes have only a fraction of the buildings they once held.

One of the unique features of Magoksa Temple is the stream nearby. It is called Taegeukgang Stream for the shape of the bends of the stream. There the river winds around like the yin-yang circle, called the “Supreme Ultimate” (*taegeuk*) symbol in Korea. The yin-yang symbol in Korea has mystical powers. The yin-yang theory and



Magoksa Temple and its Five-story Stone Pagoda

the yin-yang symbol were adopted by both Confucians and Daoists in classical China, and spread throughout East Asia. The symbol is important in Korean culture and is even found on the Korean flag today.

Legend has it that the temple was founded by the Silla monk Jajang in 640 although there are those who dispute this claim because Silla Kingdom and Baekje Kingdom, where Magoksa Temple is located, were enemies at the time, just before the unification by Silla Kingdom. The legend also states that Jajang named the temple Magok, meaning flax valley, with the idea that with a temple in this valley, Buddhism would grow rapidly, just like the fast-growing flax plants in the valley.

There are several Treasures (of the second level—National Treasure is highest, Treasure is second, and third are local area designated treasures.) One Treasure is a five-story stone pagoda (Treasure no. 799) that has a top story done in bronze in a style influenced by Tibetan Buddhism. This is said to be one of only five such pagodas in the world. This connection with Tibetan Buddhism shows the international nature of Korean Buddhism. From the earliest days, monks traveled to China and even India, and still today temples host exchanges with monks from other Mahayana lands, and even from the Theravada lands of Southeast Asia.

Magoksa Temple played an interesting role in twentieth-century history. On the grounds of the temple are some Chinese juniper trees planted by the anti-Japanese freedom fighter and president of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea, Kim Gu (1876–1949), who hid from the Japanese for a time here.

Seonamsa Temple (Suncheon, Jeollanam-do)

Located in Jeollanam-do, near Suncheon, lies Seonamsa Temple, the “Temple of the Rock of the Immortals”—said to have been so named because immortals were known to play *baduk* (go) on a rock there. In that connection it is one of the three so-called *rock* temples—with “Cloud Rock Temple” (Unamsa Temple) and “Dragon Rock Temple” (Yongamsa Temple). *Am* (/ʌm/) means rock or large boulder. More important, however, Seonamsa Temple is the headquarters and monastic training center for the Taego Order of Buddhism, the married order.

It is interesting that just over the mountain sits Songgwangsa Temple, the main monastic training center for the Jogye Order. At Seonamsa Temple, there are monastics (male and female) who are married—there is freedom of choice to marry or not. Although the celibate order has more monks—they outnumber the married monks by approximately ten to one—there are a significant number of temples around the country that belong to the Taego Order.

Historically, Seonamsa Temple is tied to the famous monk-geomancer Doseon (827–898) of the late Unified Silla period, although it is thought that the site was the location of a hermitage that dates back even earlier, to the Three Kingdoms period.

Seonamsa Temple is characterized as a feminine temple, particularly in contrast to Songgwangsa Temple, on the other side of Mt. Jogyesan, which is a more masculine temple. Certainly, Seonamsa Temple has a warmer, friendlier atmosphere in that the buildings are smaller and closer together with manicured gardens in the various courtyards between buildings.





Daeungjeon Hall (left) and a stone bridge at Seonamsa Temple

As one approaches the temple, there is a beautiful stone bridge, like a rainbow in a half-circle formation. It is absolutely beautiful, and the first of two such bridges on the mile-long trail that leads to the temple. Like so many of the major temples, the approach, climbing a path alongside a rippling stream, leads to the temple in a scenic canyon in the picturesque mountains of Korea.

Daeheungsa Temple (Haenam, Jeollanam-do)

On the far southwestern coastal area of Haenam, Jeollanam-do, sits Daeheungsa Temple, also known historically as Daedunsa Temple. Daeheungsa Temple is an old temple said to have been founded in the Baekje period by the Reverend Ado, a monk visiting from the Silla Kingdom in the sixth century. The theme of this temple is the prevention of the *three disasters*. There are two definitions of the

three disasters: one interpretation is disasters caused by nature—fire, flood, and wind. The other definition is disasters caused by mankind—war, disease, and famine.

Daeheungsa Temple has been the home, over time, of many famous masters and national preceptors, and the robes of some of these great masters are preserved in the temple. One of these was the leader of a monk army that fought the invading Japanese in 1592, the monk Great Master Seosan, also known as Hyujeong (1520–1604). Because he led an army of monks against the Japanese, the concept of state protection (*hoguk*) is invoked at Daeheungsa Temple. Thus, the prevention of disaster, specifically, protecting the country from invaders, is a theme of Daeheungsa Temple.

Daeheungsa Temple has several Treasures and one National Treasure. The main courtyard, also called the pagoda courtyard, is the largest in Korea; thus, the temple has a spaciousness and open



Daeheungsa Temple (left) and the portrait of the Great Master Seosan

feeling. Located on a mountain on the peninsula on the farther southwestern corner of Korea, the remoteness and openness of the temple are striking. Among the buildings of the complex is a hall for 100 Buddhas, and another hall for 1,000 Buddhas.

The most impressive feature of Daeheungsang Temple is the bas-relief carving of the Buddha on a large rock on the compound (National Treasure no. 308). In recent years, to protect the rock from the elements, a large glass enclosure has been built around the rock. Surrounding the Buddha, on the four corners of the large rock are smaller images looking worshipfully at the central image. This rock-carved Buddha, done during the Goryeo period (918–1392), is considered one of the finest of its kind in all of Korea.

Buseoksa Temple (Yeongju, Gyeongsangbuk-do)

One of the oldest temples in Korea, Buseoksa Temple was founded by the famous Silla monk Uisang (625–702). There is a legend accompanying the founding of the temple and the unusual rock formation there that gives it its name—Buseoksa Temple, “Temple of the Floating Rock.” Behind the main hall in the complex is a rock that looks to be suspended over the ground; thus, the idea of its having floated there. The legend says that when Uisang studied Buddhism in Tang China, a maiden became infatuated with him. When he returned to Korea, she transformed herself into a dragon to guard him on the dangerous journey home. Once back in Korea, the spirit of the dragon guided Uisang to build the temple. Once built, the dragon changed into a rock that floated off to the side of the complex to continue its protective spirit over the temple.





Buseoksa Temple

The Shrine for the Founder (Josadang Shrine) is a hall dedicated to a portrait of Uisang and is one of the oldest buildings in Korea, dating from the late Goryeo period. A simple structure, yet elegant in its simplicity and antiquity, it escaped the destruction wrought by the Japanese invasion of 1592. Simple in its architecture, it is a testament to the ancient belief system of Buddhism in Korea. In addition to the hall itself as a designated treasure (National Treasure no. 19), there are mural paintings inside the hall that have also been listed as a treasure (National Treasure no. 46).

The main hall, the Muryangsujeon Hall, is National Treasure no. 18. Built in 1376, it is one of the oldest buildings in Korea. The name means “Hall of the Buddha of Limitless Life” and is understood to be a reference to the Buddha Amitayus, another name for Amitabha, the central figure in Pure Land Buddhism, which was so popular in Tang China, and consequently in the Silla Kingdom. After studying in China, Uisang became a great advocate of Pure Land practices along with founding the Hwaeom Order in Silla.

Two more features of Buseoksa Temple are also designated as National Treasures. The Buddha inside the Muryangsujeon Hall, a gilt-clay figure, is no. 45, and no. 17 is a stone lantern in front of the hall. All together there are five National Treasures, as well as addi-



Muryangsujeon Hall

tional Treasures and other locally designated artifacts at this temple, making it one of the richest in terms of individually recognized treasures of various levels.

Bongjeongsa Temple (Andong, Gyeongsangbuk-do)

A temple not far from Buseoksa Temple, Bongjeongsa Temple was said to have been located there because the great Silla monk Uisang threw a stone from Buseoksa Temple that landed on the site, and that is where they built the temple, which means “a phoenix’s resting place.” According to tradition, it was built in 672, just after the Silla unification, and legend says it was founded by Uisang. However, a document found at the temple says it was founded by a disciple of Uisang named the Monk of Great Virtue, Neungin.

Bongjeongsa Temple has two National Treasures, and one of the two is especially noteworthy—the oldest building in Korea. The Geungnakjeon, the Hall of Extreme Bliss, a Goryeo-era building

from the twelfth or thirteenth century, has that honor. By its title we know it is a hall of an image of Amitabha, again the central figure of Pure Land Buddhism, who also figures prominently in Uisang's Hwaeom Order. Amitabha had great appeal in East Asia—China and Japan as well as Korea—during the eighth century. Uisang's study in Tang China led him to study under masters who were captivated by the simple and popular appeal of the worship of Amitabha and rebirth in the Pure Land. Amitabha vowed that he would save anyone who only called his name, and this simplified version of Buddhism had great popular appeal in the spread of Buddhism, particularly in the seventh and eighth centuries and thereafter.

Bongjeongsa Temple is also famous for a recent event. In April of 1999, Queen Elizabeth II of England visited Korea and stopped at Bongjeongsa Temple as the only, and yet representative, site of Buddhism on her trip. She visited nearby Hahoe Village, a classic Confucian village, as well.

Geungnakjeon Hall (left) and Manseru Pavilion of Bongjeongsa Temple



In addition to National Treasure no. 15, the Geungnakjeon Hall, there is a newly recognized National Treasure, no. 311, the Daeungjeon Hall, located to its side. Whereas the older hall, the Geungnakjeon, is the hall of Amitabha, the Daeungjeon is the home of Shakyamuni, the historical Buddha who was once Siddhartha Gautama.

Songgwangsa Temple (Suncheon, Jeollanam-do)

Songgwangsa Temple is one of the three jewel temples of Korea. It is the temple of the sangha, the monastery (with Tongdosa Temple the jewel temple of the Buddha, and Haeinsa Temple the temple of the dharma). Today, Songgwangsa Temple is true to its calling as the temple of the monks and the monastery, as it trains more monks than any other temple. The temple is large, with many buildings and a large courtyard and it is remote, located in the far south-central mountains of Korea. The mountain is significant: it is Mt. Jogyesan, named after the dominant order in Korea, the Jogye Order.

Songgwangsa Temple, meaning the temple of the expanse of pine tree, has a deeper meaning. The *pine tree* refers to eighteen great monks who went forth—the *expanse*—from this temple. Some authorities consider this the most important temple in Korea because of the monks it has trained and because of its location on Mt. Jogyesan. The most famous monk of the Goryeo period, Jinul (1158–1210), who is recognized as the synthesizer of the Jogye Order, held Songgwangsa Temple as his home. He synthesized two Buddhist factions that had previously argued over the proper way—one side favored texts, the other meditation. Jinul brought





Overhead view of Songgwangsa Temple (left) and its Geungnakgyo Bridge

both practices together and ended the rivalry that was dividing Buddhism.

Songgwangsa Temple was founded rather late, at the end of the twelfth century, but was built on the site of an earlier Silla temple called Gilsangsa Temple. Some prefer to say that Songgwangsa Temple was founded in the Silla period and changed its name later, but history says the site was unused for a period of time before Jinul chose the location for his home temple.

Three treasures are unique to Songgwangsa Temple. A large rice chest, carved from two tree trunks and looking like a long trough, holds enough rice to feed 4,000 monks. There are twin juniper trees with a swirled pattern of bark on their trunks that are over 500 years old. There is a set of twenty-nine brass bowls that are over



Daeungjeon Hall, with a double roof, at Songgwangsa Temple

1,000 years old. They have an unusual name—*neunggyeon, nansa*—meaning “easy to see, but difficult to comprehend.” The name of the vessels is a kind of *koan* (*gongan* in Korean), a Buddhist-style riddle used to focus the mind during a meditation session.

The main hall of Songgwangsa Temple has what’s called a *double roof*—a center section sits atop—it appears—lower sections that stick out at both ends of the upper section. The hall itself holds an unusual set of Buddha images. There is Yeondeungbul (Dipamkara Buddha), a Buddha of light, one bearing a lantern, who is one of the oldest Buddhas; Shakyamuni, the historic Buddha of our era (Siddhartha Gautama); and Maitreya, the Buddha of the future. This represents Buddhas of the past, present, and future.



Chapter 2

CONFUCIANISM

Those who argue that Confucianism is a religion like to point out that the core ceremonies in Confucian practice are the ceremonies for the dead sometimes called *ancestor worship*, although there is a kind of consensus that the ceremonies are not worship, per se, but rather a kind of veneration. Venerating one's ancestors is—not unlike showing respect to one's living relatives, from this perspective, and no one claims that the ancestors become gods in any way. Still, for those who like to call Confucianism a religion, the ancestor ceremonies are evidence of a behavior that is somewhat similar to worship in Christian churches and Buddhist temples.

Confucian ceremonies take place in three places: in buildings that can be called shrines, gravesites, and homes. The closeness or distance of the ancestor determines where the ceremony takes place.

Close relatives, within four generations, are given ceremonies at home. More distant ancestors are given ceremonies at the gravesite. And early ancestors—founders of the lineage and prominent men from history—are honored at shrines. There is some overlap, however, because those honored at shrines also have graves, as do those honored at home. Nevertheless, generally speaking, we can divide the kinds of ceremonies into these three categories.

If ancestor worship is not the preferred term, what term should we use? There is a consensus among most scholars that ancestor veneration or simply ancestor ceremonies is better. What are the ceremonies? At their core, they are offerings of food and drink to the ancestor's spirit. Since the ancestor is a spirit, he (or she) will partake of the spiritual essence of the food, and after the food is

Jongmyo Jerye, a memorial rite held for worshipping the late kings and queens of the Joseon Dynasty





Table setting for ancestral rites

pulled off the ancestral altar, it is consumed by the descendants who have made the offering. In other words, it becomes a feast and a celebration. The scale of the ceremony is generally smaller at the home, larger at the gravesite, and the largest at the shrines; but in all cases, the family members present partake of the food after the ceremony.

There are basically two kinds of high-level Confucian shrines, a public (or government-sponsored) shrine, and a privately sponsored shrine. There is an overlap in that some of the private shrines had government approval while others were built without any sort of authorization from the government. In most cases, the public and private shrines were also schools—there is a category of shrine without a school, but that is fairly rare. The government-sponsored school/shrine is called a *hyanggyo* and there was one in each county. Additionally, in the capital near the palace, there was the central academy and shrine called the Seonggyungwan National Academy.

Jongmyo Shrine (The Royal Ancestral Shrine) (Seoul)

In 1995, as a new member of the United Nations, Korea got its first three UNESCO World Heritage Sites recognized by the international body. Among them was the Jongmyo Shrine, the Royal Ancestral Shrine of the Joseon Dynasty. The shrine houses the spirit tablets of the former kings of the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910). Here, over the centuries, the current king would perform ceremonies for his ancestors, the kings who had preceded him. Today, the descendants of the kings meet one day a year, on the first Sunday of May, to carry out the ceremonies.

The ceremonies are identical to those held at the Seonggyungwan National Academy. There is an orchestra of traditional instruments, dancers who perform a very sedate dance without moving their feet, and the offerings of food and drink to the deceased. Tables are set before each spirit tablet. Unlike the Seonggyungwan National Academy, however, where all the spirits are in one hall, at the Jongmyo Shrine, each king has his own room. The rooms are set in a long row, making it one of the longest buildings of the premodern world.

There were twenty-seven kings of the Joseon Dynasty, and one could look at the long building with a



Jongmyo Jerye

doorway marking the entrance to each room and assume there were twenty-seven doors, twenty-seven rooms. But such is not the case. It turns out that there are two halls. A second hall is a little farther down the pathway deeper into the compound. The second hall is also a long building with separate entrances to separate rooms for each king, but the building is not quite as long. The reason for two halls is that there were two, really three, levels of kings in the Joseon Dynasty.

Two of Korea's kings are absent altogether. These two kings were deposed, and were forever known by their princely titles. They were never given the suffix denoting a king, either *-jo* or *-jong*, such as Sejong or Yeongjo. The two kings without kingly titles were Yeonsangun (r. 1494–1506) and Gwanghaegun (r. 1608–1623). Although each ruled for longer than many other kings, twelve years and fifteen years, they were never given the posthumous honor of a king's title, and they were not enshrined in the Jongmyo Shrine



Main Hall of Jongmyo Shrine

because they were removed from the throne.

For the remaining kings, there was a hierarchy of status between kings who were considered worthy and good, and lesser kings. The first of the lesser kings were kings who never ruled. Indeed, the founder of the dynasty, Yi Seong-gye (1335–1408), who was given the kingly title Taejo (r. 1392–1398), saw to the promotion of his father, grandfather, great-grandfather, and great-great-grandfather—four ancestors—to be kings, posthumously. After all, a king cannot be a legitimate king unless his father and ancestors were also kings—that was the rationale. At the center of the secondary hall at the Jongmyo Shrine, the central portion of the hall is raised slightly above the roofline of the portions of the hall to the left and right. That center portion houses four rooms for these ancestor kings.

There were other kings who were included in the secondary hall as well. This hall included kings who did rule, but were considered lesser kings. They were not deposed, but most had extremely short reigns. In another case, there was a king who reigned for twenty two years but was not as well regarded as other kings. This was King Myeongjong (r. 1545–1567), a king who was manipulated by his mother and his maternal uncle through much of his reign. Finally, there were other kings who did not rule, but were elevated to kingship; these men were biological fathers of royal relatives adopted as heirs to kings who had no biological heirs. The biological father of a king became a king posthumously; several such kings are found in the secondary hall. There were also crown princes who died before becoming kings. The most noteworthy was Crown Prince Sado (1735–1762), who was executed by being locked in a rice chest on



order from his father, King Yeongjo. He was later enshrined as King Jangjo.

Finally, in the main hall are the nineteen kings who, without argument, were noble kings. These included King Taejo, the founder of the dynasty; King Sejong (r. 1418–1450), who invented the Korean alphabet; King Yeongjo (r. 1724–1776), a noble king who had the longest reign, fifty-two years; and King Gojong (r. 1863–1907), the king who saw the end of the dynasty.

Enshrined with each king is his wife or, in some cases, wives. Most kings have one wife in the hall, but some have two and a few have three.

Seonggyungwan National Academy (Seoul)

The headquarters of Korean Confucianism, today and traditionally, is said to be the Seonggyungwan National Academy. Located in the northeast-central section of Seoul, it was not far from the palace complexes in the north-central section of the city. The Seonggyungwan National Academy was the place where, on the one hand, major ceremonies honoring Confucius, Chinese sages, and Korean sages were held; and on the other hand, the highest level of education took place to educate candidates for the all-important state examination. Let us first examine the ceremonies, and then address the educational system, at the apex of which stood the network of Confucian academies—*hyanggyo* (county schools) and *seowon* (private academies).

The major ceremonies at the Seonggyungwan National Academy took place twice a year: in the spring and in the autumn. This



Myeongnyundang Lecture Hall

brings to mind the Confucian classic called the *Chunqiu* (*Spring and Autumn Annals*), one of the most important Confucian texts. It is often translated as the *Annals*, or, roughly, the annual record of events during the time of Confucius. Indeed, the annals of the classic period of 600 BCE became the template for subsequent historical compilations in China and Korea.

In modern Korea, the spring celebration is featured more than that of the autumn, but both are still held. In addition to those major ceremonies, a smaller ceremony is held twice a month, on the full moon and the new moon.

The recipient of the ceremonial offerings is primarily Confucius, and with him, his four disciples, the sixteen Chinese sages, and the eighteen Korean sages. The process of recognizing a sage was complicated, and resulted in the scholar so honored being *enshrined* in the Seonggyungwan National Academy and in every *hyanggyo*

in the country. Enshrinement means that a *spirit tablet*, a wooden plaque with the honored sage's name written on it, is placed in each shrine. Each tablet sits on its own chair, a chair that looks much like a child's highchair in the West. Each chair and tablet sit in a prescribed order in each shrine around the country. Each tablet is covered with a box-like covering that is lifted off to expose the wooden tablet with the name of the sage, only on the occasion of a ceremony. Lifting off the cover invites the spirit to come and partake of the food offerings, which is the heart of the ceremony.

The Seonggyungwan National Academy serves a dual purpose: ritual and education. There are two primary buildings, one for each purpose, and then ancillary buildings around the courtyards to support each activity. In front of each of the two major buildings there is a courtyard—one supporting ritual and one supporting education. Surrounding the courtyard for the ceremonies are buildings where officials can change into ceremonial robes, and buildings that store vessels of bronze to hold the various foodstuffs for the offerings. The entrance to the first courtyard, which is for ceremonies, is marked by a three-door gate. The three-door gate is always found at places of ritual and the doors have symbolic and ritual usage. The right door is for mortals to enter, the left door is for mortals to exit, and the center door is called the *spirit door*, which is only opened to welcome the spirits during the ceremonies.

Inside the ceremonial courtyard, we see the building for the rituals. It has a signboard that says "Hall of the Great Accomplishment" (Daeseongjeon Shrine). This is, of course, a reference to Confucius. Inside that building are the spirit tablets to honor Confucius, his



Daeseongjeon Shrine

four disciples, the sixteen Chinese sages, and the eighteen Korean sages. On each side of the courtyard is a pair of ginkgo trees. At all Confucian shrines, traditionally and without exception, there are two ginkgo trees—two because ginkgo trees are either male or female, and there must be a male tree for the female tree to bear fruit. It is said that Confucius loved ginkgo trees; and thus, every shrine has a pair of ginkgo trees.

At the Seonggyungwan National Academy, there are two pairs of ginkgo trees. Inside the inner courtyard, there is a second pair. The inner courtyard, behind the building for ritual, is the courtyard for education. At the north end of the courtyard is the building for lectures and teaching, the “Hall for Elucidating Morality” (Myeongnyundang Lecture Hall). This building, though not imposing or grand in size, is important enough that it is found on the face of the KRW 1,000 currency today.

To the sides of the courtyard are dormitories for students. Each room, in a long row, is a living space inside the wall of the courtyard. Each room has a window to the courtyard and a door on the outside of the structure. Beyond the courtyard of the education building to the east is a set of buildings that include a dining hall and kitchen facilities, including quarters for servants who were owned by the academy. There is an interesting record kept at the Seonggyungwan National Academy indicating that roll call was held in the dining facility, which is how they knew students were present and in attendance at lectures.

Hyanggyo (Local Confucian Schools)

The *hyanggyo*, literally *county schools*, were officially sponsored by the government. There were about 340 *hyanggyo* in the past, and each was modeled after the Seonggyungwan National Academy in Seoul.

In the ritual building, the focal point is the spirit tablet of Confucius. Then there are those of the four disciples, but the sixteen Chinese sages are often excluded from the *hyanggyo*—not always, but often. Some *hyanggyo* have the full array, and some leave out the sixteen Chinese sages. However, they all include the eighteen Korean sages. Among the eighteen Korean sages are two from the Silla period, two from the Goryeo period, and fourteen from the Joseon period. Noteworthy among the sages from the Silla era is the first to be honored, the father of Confucianism in Korea, Seol Chong (ca. 650–730), who was the codifier of *idu*—the system of using Chinese characters to write Korean before Hangeul was





Cheongan Hyanggyo, Goesan, Chungcheongbuk-do

invented. Also honored is Choe Chi-won (857–d. after 908), who went to China as a youth, passed the civil service examination in Tang China, and served in the Tang bureaucracy. The two sages from the Goryeo period were An Hyang (1243–1306), who brought Neo-Confucianism and the teachings of Zhu Xi to Korea, and Jeong Mong-ju (1337–1392), who is famous for his loyalty to the Goryeo king. Of the fourteen sages from the Joseon period, the two most noteworthy are the two men on the currency today: on the KRW 1,000 note, we have the Neo-Confucian scholar-official Yi Hwang (1501–1570; pen name Toegye); and on the KRW 5,000 note, Yi I (1536–1584; pen name Yulgok). Also, one more of noteworthy status is Song Si-yeol (1607–1689), who was not only a scholar, but also served in the government for over fifty years, much of that time as a prime minister. He has over 3,000 entries in the official history, the *Annals of the Joseon Dynasty* (*Joseon Wangjo Sillok*)—more than any other man who was not a king.

Gangneung Hyanggyo (Gangneung, Gangwon-do)

One of the finest examples of a *hyanggyo* is the Gangneung Hyanggyo in the east coast city Gangneung. This *hyanggyo* is one of the older and larger of the county schools, arranged in the typical layout with the school in the front and the shrine in the back. It was believed to have been built in the late Goryeo period, in 1313. It burned down in 1411, but was promptly rebuilt. It was a classic *hyanggyo*, training young scholars from the area throughout the Joseon period. At the close of the Joseon Dynasty, in 1909, it was used as a school for a modern, Westernized curriculum, but closed when the Japanese took over and was transformed into training center for silk farmers. Fortunately, the buildings survived, have been well-kept, and are a magnificent symbol of traditional education in Korea.

Gyeongju Hyanggyo (Gyeongju, Gyeongsangbuk-do)

The *hyanggyo* in Gyeongju is architecturally different from those built later. It has features that are probably typical of the Goryeo period, if not the Silla period, since Gyeongju was the Silla capital.



Daeseongjeon Shrine at Gangneung Hyanggyo (left) and Gyeongju Hyanggyo

Not only are the buildings a little different, but the openness of the complex, occupying more land than most *hyanggyo* perhaps, indicates a connection to the time when Gyeongju was the capital of the Silla Kingdom. We are uncertain of the location, but we know there was a national academy located in Gyeongju. There is a high likelihood that the *hyanggyo* is located on the foundations of the original national academy of the late Silla period.

Seowon (Private Confucian Academies)

Beginning in 1542, the Joseon period saw a movement that eventually doubled the number of schools in Korea. The *hyanggyo* were administered by the state, by the local county government, but the *seowon* were administered by local committees composed of descendants of prominent scholars—descendants both genealogically and intellectually. Indeed, each *seowon* was dedicated to the memory of one man.

The first *seowon* was called the Sosu Seowon and was founded by Ju Se-bung (1495–1554), who had traveled to China and saw the school that Zhu Xi (1130–1200) had founded. Zhu Xi's school was called the “White Deer Seowon” and Ju Se-bung originally called his academy the Baegundong Seowon (White Cloud Seowon), but later the name changed to Sosu Seowon, the “Continue the Polishing” academy. The academy was dedicated to the memory of An Hyang (1243–1306), who is credited with bringing the books of Zhu Xi to Korea and introducing Neo-Confucianism to Korea in the late Goryeo period. Zhu Xi had lived nearly 200 years earlier, in the time of the Southern Song Dynasty (1127–1279), but his philosophy





Jikbangjae Dormitory of Sosu Seowon

had spread throughout China and Koreans were starting to hear about it. Although it took nearly 200 years for the ideas to spread to Korea, once they did, they took over the intellectual scene in Korea. The Joseon Dynasty, which was founded within a century of An Hyang's time, was founded on the basis of Neo-Confucian principles. Although it took time, through the first century of the Joseon period, the fifteenth century, Neo-Confucianism came to take over. By the next century, debate on the finer points of Neo-Confucian ideology became the intellectual lifeblood of the dynasty. The two greatest scholars of Korean history, and perhaps the two greatest cultural icons of Korea, Yi Hwang and Yi I, lived in the next century, the sixteenth. The impact of Neo-Confucianism on Korea is perhaps best symbolized by the fact that it is these two scholars who are on the common denominations of money in Korea today, together with

King Sejong, who is on the KRW 10,000 note.

Once Neo-Confucianism got its hold on Korea in the early Joseon period, it did not let go throughout the full 500-year history of the dynasty. Another symbol of that deepening interest in the intellectual stimulation of Neo-Confucianism is the spread of the *seowon* movement. After the founding of the Baegundong Seowon (Sosu Seowon) in 1542, *seowon* were founded all over the peninsula.

Imgo Seowon (Yeongcheon, Gyeongsangbuk-do)

In Yeongcheon, Gyeongsangbuk-do, one of the first *seowon*, dedicated in 1553, was built to honor Jeong Mong-ju, the great Goryeo scholar-official who gave his life rather than be disloyal to the Goryeo king, as his colleagues were all getting on board with Yi Seong-gye for the founding of the new Joseon Dynasty in 1392. He was forgiven by the Yi royalty and given posthumous honor as early as 1401. Eventually, he was enshrined in the Seonggyungwan National Academy and this *seowon*, the Imgo Seowon, was built in his honor.

His loyalty came at the price of his life. He was assassinated because he refused to join the cabal that was setting up to take over power, end the Goryeo Dynasty, and establish what came to be called the Joseon Dynasty. The place of his assassination was a bridge near his home in Gaeseong, the capital of the Goryeo Dynasty. He was killed riding his horse home from a meeting with Yi Bang-won, the son of the founder of the new dynasty, Yi Seong-gye. Legend has it that his blood has permanently stained the bridge, and that when it rains, the bloodstains shine as if they were fresh. Today in Gaeseong, the bridge is one of the most visited sites there. Yeongcheon was the

hometown of Jeong Mong-ju and it is there, not far from Gyeongju, that the *seowon* dedicated to him was built. Interestingly, in front of the *seowon*, they have built a replica of the bridge in Gaeseong.

In addition, the Imgo Seowon carries one more unique cultural tribute to Jeong Mong-ju. When he was invited to participate in the coup to set up the new dynasty, he rejected the offer, knowing that to do so meant he would die. He allegedly wrote a poem in the classic Korean poetic format called a *sijo*. It said:

Though I die, and die again;
 Though I die one hundred deaths,
 After my bones have turned to dust;
 Whether my soul lives on or not,
 My red heart, forever loyal to my Lord,
 Will never fade away.

This poem, memorized by every Korean schoolchild, is written in stone in front of the Imgo Seowon. The poem tells the truth. Though Jeong has been dead for over 600 years, his loyalty lives on in this poem known to all Koreans and appropriately inscribed in stone at the entrance to his *seowon*.

Oksan Seowon (Gyeongju, Gyeongsangbuk-do)

Built at about the same time as the Dosan Seowon, the Oksan Seowon is dedicated to the memory of Yi Eon-jeok (1491–1553). Yi was a great scholarly innovator in the interpretation of Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism. Many of his ideas exercised great influence on Yi Hwang, who came along a few years later. The Oksan Seowon





Oksan Seowon

took nearly nineteen years after the death of Yi Eon-jeok to get built (in 1573). The Dosan Seowon was built three years after Yi Hwang died (in 1574). The late sixteenth century saw the proliferation of *seowon*, and the rate only increased in the seventeenth century.

The Oksan Seowon was built in a beautiful setting in a deep wood on the banks of a stream that cuts through a beautiful rock formation. The *seowon* is next to a small cascade in the stream that lends credence to the unwritten rule that a *seowon* must be built in a beautiful natural setting.

The *seowon*, typical of all private academies, has two main buildings, one for teaching and one for ceremonies. Here at the Oksan Seowon, the building for teaching is called the Guindang, meaning “the building for the search of humaneness.” Humaneness (仁, *in*) is the heart of Confucianism. The Sino-Korean character *in* (*ren* in Chinese) is sometimes translated as *human-heartedness*. It means the relationship between two people and implies all of the moral relationships of Confucianism: king to subject, parent to child, husband to wife, senior to junior, and friend to friend. The hall for ceremonies

also has the character *in* in it; it is the Cheinmyo, the shrine for the embodiment of humaneness. *Humaneness* is learned (sought) in the school and practiced (embodied) in the hall of ceremonies.

Korean officials are preparing a proposal to have several of the major *seowon* made into UNESCO World Heritage Sites, but the Oksan Seowon has already been so designated because it was included in the UNESCO inscription of the Yangdong and Hahoe traditional villages. In 2010, these two villages were recognized by the UNESCO organization, and although located about eight kilometers from Yangdong Village itself, the UNESCO proclamation included the *seowon* as part of the village. This is also true for the Byeongsan Seowon (see p72), located four kilometers from Hahoe Village. Therefore, the Oksan Seowon and the Byeongsan Seowon are already internationally recognized ahead of the other *seowon* that are in the application procedure at the time of this writing.

Dosan Seowon (Andong, Gyeongsangbuk-do)

In many regards, the Dosan Seowon, built in 1574, is the most important *seowon* in Korea. It is featured on the KRW 1,000 note, both in regard to its connections with Yi Hwang (1501–1570), who is the historical figure on the note, and because it is the painting of the Dosan Seodang (village school) and its surroundings that is featured on the reverse side of the note. Yi Hwang established the village school to devote himself to study and teaching, and it was elevated to the Dosan Seowon after his death. The Dosan Seowon is probably the most visited Confucian academy as well, even though it is relatively remote and hard to get to. It's not on the way to any



other place; if you go there, it's because it is your primary destination, and there are numerous visitors.

The Dosan Seowon has one feature different from most: it was built on the grounds of the scholar's residence. Most *seowon* are located in picturesque locations, somewhat removed from villages and residences. Not the Dosan Seowon. While the setting is picturesque, it is on the very site of the residence of Yi Hwang, built just behind the house where Yi Hwang once lived and taught. In fact, one of the more striking aspects of this site is Yi Hwang's humble home. It is not large by any stretch and bespeaks the antimaterialism of Confucianism. But the interesting thing is the addition to the porch of his house—the extension of the porch and of the roof over the porch so that another six or eight students might sit and study with the master.

The Dosan Seowon, like the house of Yi Hwang, is of a humble scale. The educational buildings and dormitories behind the house are smaller than those found at most *seowon*, and the facilities are somewhat crowded onto the hillside behind the house. The ear-



Dosan Seowon (left) and a distant view of Sisadan Stele from the *seowon*

lier Sosu Seowon is set in the bottom of a valley, on the banks of a stream, and has open spaces. But the Dosan Seowon is set on a steep hillside where one climbs stairs to the house, more stairs to the school, and up a steep set of stairs to the shrine. The scene to the front is beautiful today because it overlooks the reservoir created by the Andong Dam, but traditionally it overlooked a beautiful valley.

Piram Seowon (Jangseong, Jeollanam-do)

At the same time that Ju Se-bung, Yi Hwang, and Yi Eon-jeok were flourishing in the Gyeongsangbuk-do area in southeast Korea, and in Jeolla-do in the southwest, Kim In-hu (1510–1560) was leading scholarship on Neo-Confucianism in his region. Eventually, Kim In-hu became one of the eighteen sages enshrined at the Seonggyungwan National Academy in Seoul. He was the only scholar from the southwest to be so honored.

The *seowon* dedicated to him, the Piram Seowon (sometimes romanized Pilam) was dedicated in 1590, just after the early *seowon* created in the Gyeongsang-do region. It is located in the heart of the Jeolla-do province area in Jangseong, near today's regional capital, Gwangju.

Architecturally, one is first struck by the imposing gatehouse at the entrance. The gate building is a large, two-story building with an upper floor and open deck that provides space for discussions as well as a commanding view of the whole complex. Untypically, however, the gatehouse is colorfully painted, almost reminiscent of a Buddhist structure. The rest of the complex is more traditional in its plain paint.





Gwagyeonnu Pavilion (left) and Cheongjeoldang Lecture Hall of Piram Seowon

Arranged in the typical school-in-front, shrine-in-back orientation, the courtyards and open areas are more spacious than those at most *seowon*. There is a large courtyard inside the gatehouse before one reaches the school building. Although the school is in the front, the dormitories are in the courtyard behind the school; whereas, at most *seowon*, the dormitories are in the courtyard in front of the school.

In the school courtyard, there is an extra building to house wood engravings (blocks engraved with a painting of bamboo) bestowed by King Injong. The building has an added feature: the signboard for the building was calligraphed by a king, King Jeongjo (r. 1776–1800). This speaks to the method of honoring Confucian scholars. Kim In-hu died in 1560, the *seowon* was dedicated in 1590, and the king sent a signboard 200 years later.

The ritual space, as with most *seowon*, is separated from the schoolyard with a wall and a three-door gate. The building that houses the spirit tablet of Kim In-hu is relatively small; in fact, it is only slightly larger than the structure built to house the engravings given to the *seowon* by the king.

Byeongsan Seowon (Andong, Gyeongsangbuk-do)

The Byeongsan Seowon is located near Hahoe Village, which together with Yangdong Village was recognized by UNESCO in 2010 as a World Heritage Site. The scholar-official honored in the Byeongsan Seowon is Ryu Seong-ryong, who was the prime minister during the Japanese Invasion of 1592.

The most striking thing about the Byeongsan Seowon is its namesake. Byeongsan means screen mountain, which means that the mountain looks like a standing screen, such as one finds set up in a home, with eight or ten panels, with art or calligraphy on each panel. Indeed, on the far side of a gentle curve of the Nakdonggang River stands a mountain ridge of uniform height that undulates in and out, just like a standing screen. In harmony with the mountain on the opposite side of the river, stands the *seowon* facing the center of the mountain screen with a long building facing the mountain, mirroring the reach of the mountain from side to side, longer than most premodern buildings. But the beauty of the building is the second story, an open-air pavilion where one can sit and discuss some arcane doctrine, recite poetry, or just look out at the beautiful river and mountains.

One enters the compound through a three-tier gate, but it only has one door. This is a bit unusual because almost all such shrines have three doors. Inside the gate, one walks through the bottom floor of the two-story pavilion and climbs stairs into the main courtyard. Behind you now is the upper deck of the pavilion, open on all four sides with a great view of the surrounding scenery. The rest of the compound is like other *seowon*, with lecture halls and





Byeongsan Seowon (left) and its Ipgyodang Lecture Hall

dormitories on the sides, and the ritual space behind the school. One variation might be worth mentioning. While most *seowon*, like nearly all *hyanggyo*, are lined up on a central axis, the shrine space at the Byeongsan Seowon is off-center to the right, as is the shrine at the Dosan Seowon. But at the Oksan Seowon and most *seowon* that developed later, symmetry is the rule, with the main buildings lining up on the central axis.

The main figure enshrined here is Ryu Seong-ryong, who, as prime minister, helped guide Korea through the perilous years, 1592–1598, of the Japanese invasion. His diary is one of the treasures of Korean historians; wherein, he recorded in detail Korea's fight against the invaders.

Donam Seowon (Nonsan, Chungcheongnam-do)

The Donam Seowon was built to honor the great scholar Kim Jang-saeng (1548–1631) in 1634. In 1660, King Hyeonjong calligraphed the signboard to hang at the main hall. The royal signboard made the Donam Seowon one of the protected *seowon* that were not destroyed

or downgraded during the rule of the Heungseon Daewongun, who, as regent for the king in the 1860s, recognized only forty-seven *seowon*.

Most noteworthy at the Donam Seowon are the scholars enshrined there. In addition to being the primary *seowon* to honor Kim Jang-saeng, there are three other major figures enshrined here. Altogether, these four scholars are also enshrined in the Seonggyungwan National Academy. The only father-son pair enshrined at the Seonggyungwan National Academy is Kim Jang-saeng and his son, Kim Jip—Kim Jip is also enshrined here at the Donam Seowon. The other two from the National Academy were distant cousins, Song Jun-gil and Song Si-yeol.

More than their physical features, the buildings, or National Treasures, at this *seowon*, the unique feature is the family connections of the great sages honored here—two are father and son, and two, although not close family, are from the same lineage. None of the other sages are of the same lineage.

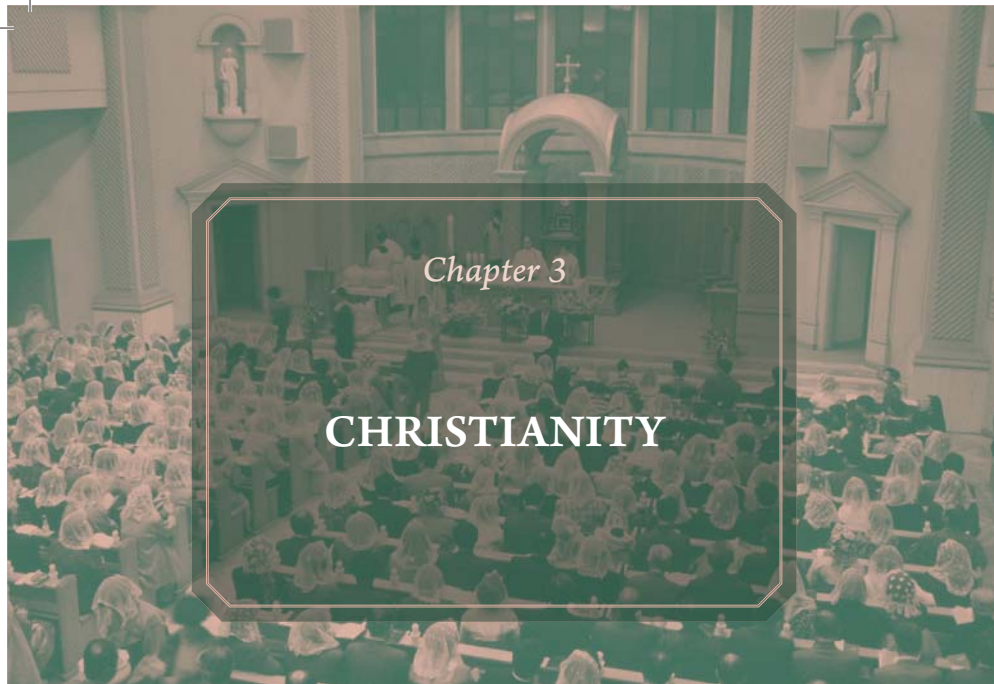
Song Si-yeol is particularly noteworthy. Of all the scholars enshrined in the National Academy, he wielded the most political power. The eighteen honored scholar-officials were more noted for their scholarship than for the particular political office they held. None was a prime minister, with one exception—Song Si-yeol. He not only had the highest office in the land, he held office longer than any other official of those honored in the National Academy or not. He served as prime minister to five kings, holding the highest office longer than any other official. In the end, his political enemies convinced King Sukjong, who was then only fifteen years old, that Song should be driven from office and sent into internal exile. Song's



The front gate of Donam Seowon

friends came to his rescue, and he was ordered released and allowed to return to Seoul. However, Song's enemies rallied and opposed the release, and in fact came up with stronger indictments, such that the manipulated boy-king ordered Song's execution.

Song was on the way back to Seoul when the king's messengers arrived with the *bestowal of death*—the poison for Song to drink, all bottled in fine porcelain and boxed in fine lacquerware. Song was no mere bureaucrat. It was his understanding and writing about Neo-Confucianism that got him installed in the shrine at the Seonggyungwan National Academy, and in several *seowon*, like the Donam Seowon, around the country.



Chapter 3

CHRISTIANITY

Christianity in Korea is a two-part story. One part Catholic and one part Protestant. The Catholic story is older—dating back to the eighteenth or even seventeenth century—and the Protestant story is younger, dating back to the 1880s. The Catholic story is filled with persecution and martyrdom; the Protestant story is one of good fortune and good timing. Their stories are so different and the divide between the two forms of Christianity is so sharp that the terminology for the two is distorted. *Christian* has come to mean Protestant, and Catholics are somehow mostly excluded from the term *Christian*. It is not unusual to find that when you ask a Korean Catholic if he is Christian, he will reply, “No. I’m a Catholic.”

The first Korean Catholics were those who, on diplomatic missions to China, had met Catholics from Europe in Beijing. The



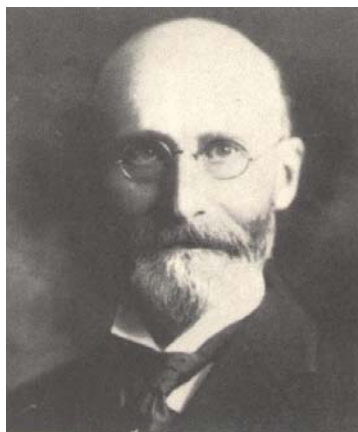
Koreans were fascinated with the different-looking foreigners and were impressed with their knowledge of the world and of science. Rather than call the doctrine of these foreigners *Catholic*, they called it *Western Learning* and in many ways, it was the scientific knowledge more than the religious knowledge that appealed to the Koreans. But with the new way of looking at the world came the religion; and Koreans in China, and then surreptitiously in Korea, began to join the Catholic Church. This clandestine activity was viewed by the court as being disloyal to the Confucian-based state orthodoxy, and the government led bloody suppression of the Catholics in three great persecutions in 1801, 1839, and the 1860s. Relief came only in the 1880s.

Protestant Christianity entered Korea with royal blessings, cen-

Stained glass window at Saenamteo Catholic Martyrs' Shrine



tering on the events of 1884 when the Radical Reformist Faction of government officials attempted to assassinate members of the Conservative Faction, including the brothers-in-law of the king. This turn of events was fortunate for the Protestants. The attempted assassinations were set to take place at the dedication of Korea's first modern post office on December 4, 1884. The strategy failed and Kim Ok-gyun, leader of the Radical Reformist Faction, fled to Incheon and boarded a ship for Japan, but his co-conspirators were able to wound Min Yeong-ik, a key figure in the Conservative Faction. It was known that one of the American diplomats, Horace Allen at the American legation, was a surgeon, and he was called in to save Min's life. The surgery was successful; but more importantly, the incident brought Allen in contact with King Gojong, who was appreciative of the American's medical ability. Allen then asked King Gojong for permission to bring missionaries into Korea who could train young Koreans in Western medicine. But to learn Western



Horace Allen (left), relief panel commemorating the March First Movement

medicine, students needed to have a general Western education, so the missionaries offered to build schools as well as hospitals. More importantly, since the missionaries were bringing in education and medical training, they were allowed to set up churches as well, and all with royal approval.

Therefore, the Protestants were able to operate freely and openly. The result was, ultimately, that Korea has become the most Christian of all Asian countries, with the exception of the Philippines.

Not only did Korean Protestantism start out on the right side of political power in Korea, but it also came to be associated with nationalism and the right side of politics in the complicated twentieth century. With the imperialistic Japanese takeover of Korea in 1910, and growing power even before then, the Western Christian missionaries, as symbols of Christianity, were seen as a positive alternative to the Japanese. Specifically, in the March First Movement (Samil Undong) of 1919, when the people held massive demonstrations against Japan and called for Korean independence, the Christians were again on the right side of nationalism in that the written declaration of Korean independence was spread through the countryside by the Christian churches as well as the native Cheondogyo (Religion of the Heavenly Way) churches. Among the thirty-three signers of the declaration, sixteen were Christians, two were Buddhists, and fifteen were members of Cheondogyo.

Modern Korean Christianity is still seen as a force for good in Korea today. Leaders in politics and industry, in education and medicine, in business and social service, in virtually all sectors of society are often members of a Christian church.



Pope Francis visiting Korea in 2014

Korean Christianity was given a great boost in 1984 when Pope John Paul II visited Korea. He not only held Mass, but 103 Korean martyrs were canonized as saints, together with thirteen French missionary-martyrs, during his visit. The occasion was the bicentennial of Catholicism in Korea—marking the 200th anniversary of the baptism of the first Korean Catholic, in 1784 when Yi Seung-hun (1756–1801) was baptized while in China and given the Christian name of Peter.

The year 1984 also marked the centennial of the beginning of Protestant activity in Korea. Billy Graham and other Protestant leaders also visited Korea. All the activities for Christians, Catholic and Protestant, in 1984 gave Christians a great boost in the number of practitioners and in activity.

Percentages of believers are approximately equal for Buddhists and Christians. One can find government figures and Gallup poll

figures that will give specific percentages to the first or second decimal point but in many ways, a general number is more meaningful, and in those terms Christian and Buddhist numbers are close to equal, each with about a fourth of the population.

Myeong-dong Cathedral (Seoul)

The most important cathedral of the Catholic Church in Korea is the Cathedral Church of the Virgin Mary of the Immaculate Conception, more commonly known as the Myeong-dong Cathedral, in downtown Seoul. On a hill overlooking the city center, at the time it was built, it was the largest building in Korea. It is the headquarters of the Catholic Church in Korea and the seat of the archbishop. The church is built in classic Gothic style and the inside is decorated in religious art and sculpture with beautiful stained-glass windows.

The cathedral stands as a symbol of the martyrdoms and sufferings of the early Catholic efforts in Korea. At the time the cathedral was built, from 1892 to 1898, Korea had already suffered a century of martyrdom. The court saw Catholicism as a challenge to its authority and led waves of arrests and persecutions throughout the nineteenth century. The relics of nine of those martyrs are buried in the crypt of the Myeong-dong Cathedral, located beneath the main altar of the sanctuary.

By the time the Myeong-dong Cathedral was completed, the Korean court had reversed itself and was supportive of Christianity. This became more important in the light of the growing Japanese pressure on Korea. This led to Korean Christianity coming to be identified with nationalism and as a pro-Korean force in a changing



Myeong-dong Cathedral (left), pro-democracy demonstrations by citizens and students in front of Myeong-dong Cathedral in 1987

and uncertain world.

Later, during the fight for democracy under the military regimes from the 1960s to the 1980s, the Myeong-dong Cathedral was the focal point of many protests against the government. Kim Dae-jung (1924–2009), the leader of many of the opposition movements and later the president of Korea from 1998 to 2003, was the most visible of Catholic political figures. Often, during political protests against the authoritarian governments, demonstrators would take sanctuary from the authorities by hiding in various Catholic churches throughout Korea, including the Myeong-dong Cathedral. Now, in an age of full and open democracy, the Catholic Church is seen as the vanguard of a heritage of religious freedom in Korea.

Yakhyeon Cathedral (Seoul)

Older than the more famous Myeong-dong Cathedral is the Yakhyeon Cathedral (Jungnim-dong Cathedral), located about two kilometers west of Myeong-dong. Construction began in 1891 and was completed in 1892, the year they began construction of the larger Myeong-dong building. The Yakhyeon Cathedral was the first Western-style church built in Korea, and like the Myeong-dong Cathedral is built in classic Gothic style. The Yakhyeon Cathedral is more directly associated with the legacy of martyrdom of the earlier Catholic efforts in Korea. On the one hand, it was built at the outset of the new era of religious freedom in Korea, brought about by the success of the Protestants in 1884. When they were able to convince the king of their good intentions, the Catholics also benefited, and King Gojong himself assisted in the groundbreaking for the cathedral. It was built near the site of the martyrdom of some of the early Korean saints, and indeed, near the cathedral is a memorial park dedicated to the memory of the martyrs.

Like the Myeong-dong Cathedral, named for the area of Seoul it occupies, the Yakhyeon Cathedral is also named for its neighborhood. Yakhyeon means “hillside of medicine,” or medicinal herbs; so named because of the herbs that once grew naturally on the hillside. At the foot of the hill are the Seosomun execution grounds where criminals were executed during the Joseon Dynasty, including the Catholics who were executed for their faith. Of the 103 Korean saints, forty-four were executed at the Seosomun site, which was at the time just outside the city walls of Seoul. Others were executed in various places including a large number at Mt. Jeoldusan, literally





Yakhyeon Cathedral (left) and its inside

the “hill for beheading,” located on the banks of the Hangang River, another few kilometers west of the Seosomun-Yakhyeon area.

The structure has changed over the years. The steeple was built and the bell installed in 1905. The interior was remodeled in 1921, and there was a complete renovation in 1974. Then the whole church was burned down, but rebuilt in 2000 along the lines of the original configuration of the 1892 structure. Although it bears many architectural features of the original church, they have changed one aspect of the chapel. It used to have a curtain running down the middle of the chapel to separate the genders, as was the custom in many churches in bygone days. Now there is no curtain and the separation of the genders is no longer a feature of worship at the Yakhyeon Cathedral.

Incheon Dapdong Cathedral (Incheon)

In the late nineteenth century, Incheon, then called Jemulpo, was the port of access to Seoul and, as such, it was also the location of another of the early Catholic cathedrals of Korea. Built in 1886, expanded in 1897, and then remodeled in 1933, the Dapdong Cathedral in the heart of Incheon is an important religious site in Korea.

Incheon was a bustling international port city. Ships from many nations visited and traded with Korea. Not far away, Ganghwa Island was a kind of fortress that offered protection for the Hangang River estuary and access to Seoul. Incheon saw French, Dutch, British, American, and other ships, and was therefore a logical place for the building of a major cathedral. The Dapdong Cathedral started with a smaller building as early as 1886; in 1890 they began to expand the building, but were interrupted by the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895. Finally, in 1897, they were able to complete the cathedral on a classic scale. The early architectural guidance and financing came from French



Incheon Dapdong Cathedral

missionaries, particularly the French priest Eugene Coste, who also oversaw the building of the Yakhyeon Cathedral and the Myeong-dong Cathedral. The building originally was in Gothic style, but it was remodeled in 1937 to a Romanesque style when the exterior was redone with brick walls.

The cathedral was damaged during the Korean War, but gradually restored. By 1959 they were able to restore the cathedral completely, including all the stained-glass windows.

The red brick is also seen inside the cathedral, which was built in the classic cross shape. There are granite pillars at corners and surrounding the entrances. There is a main entrance in the front and entrances on each side of the nave. The front is marked by a tall central steeple with smaller steeples on each side, which together make a clear statement—they point to heaven. Inside the compound is one of Korea's convents.

Jeonju Jeondong Cathedral (Jeonju, Jeollabuk-do)

In the southwest quadrant of Korea, we can find the Jeondong Cathedral in the provincial capital, Jeonju, Jeollabuk-do. Unlike the Seoul cathedrals, Myeong-dong and Yakhyeon, which are built on hills, the Jeondong Cathedral is on flat land in the center of the city. The cathedral is built near where Catholic martyrs were executed; in fact, the first two martyrs, (Paul) Yun Ji-chung (1759–1791) and Gwon Sang-yeon (1751–1791), were executed there in 1791. There followed waves of executions in 1801, 1839, and the 1860s, but the first martyr, Paul Yun, lived in Jeonju.

Yun's story is interesting. He was from an upper-class family



Jeonju Jeondong Cathedral

that would ordinarily perform ceremonies for the ancestors, beginning with the funeral for one's father. Yun, a recent convert to Catholicism, chose not to lead the funeral for his mother in the standard Confucian format. His decision attracted the attention of the local officials, who already had disagreements with believers of the new, imported religion. At that point it was not called Catholicism, or today's equivalent, Cheonjugyo (literally, the Church of the Lord of Heaven), but rather, then, it was called Seohak, literally Western Learning. Unfortunately, Catholicism was perceived as pro-West and anti-East. The first death in this conflict was the execution for heterodox practice, refusing to perform the ceremonies for one's deceased parent. And the first martyr was Paul Yun. The Jeonju Jeondong Cathedral is a vivid reminder of the heritage of martyrdom and suffering of the Catholic Church in Korea.

Chungdong First Methodist Church (Seoul)

The Chungdong First Methodist Church is one of the oldest Protestant churches in Korea. Located in the heart of Seoul, on the west side of the palace districts (Gyeongbokgung Palace to the north and Deoksugung Palace to the south), Jeong-dong was the center of action in the late nineteenth century. Diplomatic missions from several countries were located in the area as were several churches. The Chungdong First Methodist Church was the first to build a chapel here.

There was a traditional Korean building, a *hanok*-style building, where the church began in 1885. By 1897 they built a Western-inspired building. A small building at the outset, by 1926 they were able to add wings to expand their worship space. Described as Victorian-style architecture, the church has been designated as Historic Site no. 256.

In the courtyard there is a bust of the founder of the church, the American pioneer missionary Henry Appenzeller (1858–1902). Appenzeller arrived with the first group of missionaries, including Horace Underwood (1859–1916), who went on to found Yonsei University. Early missionaries not only founded churches, but schools. Appenzeller was the founder of the Baejae School, which was not yet a university but initially a very important high school. Mary Scranton (1832–1909), who also arrived in 1885 and was associated with the Chungdong First Methodist Church, famously founded Ewha Girls School in 1886, which later became Ewha Womans University, the largest women's university in the world.

Jeong-dong was the base for many foreign legations in the late nineteenth century as Korea was opening to Western countries.



Chungdong First Methodist Church

The Americans, British, Germans, and Russians had their respective legations (later called embassies) located in Jeong-dong. The American ambassador's residence is still close by and the British Embassy and Anglican Church headquarters are also in the same neighborhood.

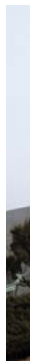
Today, access to Jeong-dong is by a narrow street that preserves the atmosphere and charm of old Seoul. The access to the Chungdong First Methodist Church is the little street that goes along the south wall of the Deoksugung Palace. In the neighborhood are the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, and the headquarters for the Salvation Army Korea. Just beyond the Chungdong First Methodist Church is the Jeongdong Theater. Most of these institutions have deep roots in Korea's early modernization era. And the Chungdong First Methodist Church was among the first of these historic sites.

Jeam-ri Methodist Church (Hwaseong, Gyeonggi-do)

The Jeam-ri Church played an important, and tragic, role in the history of Korea. It was the site of one of the saddest episodes of the anti-Japanese protests during the March First Movement (Samil Undong) of 1919. Jeam-ri is located in the countryside to the southwest of Suwon, south of Seoul. It was here that Japanese officials, led by a young lieutenant, forced twenty-three Korean demonstrators into a church and then set the church on fire. This was one of the worst atrocities of the Japanese occupation of Korea. The church has been rebuilt and next to it is a memorial hall that commemorates the horrific events that took place there.

At the time of the atrocity, Korean witnesses told the story of what had happened there, but the Japanese authorities produced their own story, basically denying that they had set the church on fire, insisting instead that the people were killed resisting arrest. Although the Korean accounts are adequate to establish the story, in 2007, the private journal of the Japanese commanding general in Korea, Utsunomiya Taro, disclosed that he had been given a true report of the incident, but that it was considered significantly disadvantageous to the Empire, so they devised a cover-up to hide their guilt. The lieutenant responsible for the atrocity was punished with thirty days' confinement for his role in the affair. In addition to burning the church, the Japanese military burned several houses in the village, but in those structures, the residents could flee; however, six villagers were shot to death. Those in the church were locked in and burned or shot to death.

The March First Movement was brutally suppressed. There were





Jeam-ri Methodist Church (left), relief panel illustrating the massacre at Jeam-ri Church

other incidents and atrocities besides the Jeam-ri Church slaughter. The Japanese may have keyed on the Christians, and also the followers of Cheondogyo, because it was through the network of these churches that the printed copy of the declaration was circulated. It was in the churches where people met to read and discuss the declaration.

Although the March First Movement did not succeed when it unfolded in 1919, it lit the fires for independence that eventually came to Korea in 1945. Much of the definition of nationalism and Korean identity had its beginnings in the March First Movement, and the Jeam-ri Methodist Church served as a major symbol in the process of creating Korea's modern identity.

Geumsan Presbyterian Church (Gimje, Jeollabuk-do)

The Presbyterian movement in Jeollabuk-do dates back to 1897, when a missionary who took the Korean name Jeon Wi-ryeom, ac-

tually named W. M. Junkin, initiated missionary work in the Gimje area. There were buildings used temporarily for worship at the time, but then they were able to build their own church, a Korean-style building, in 1909, due to the efforts of a missionary named Lewis Boyd Tate, who used the Korean name Choe Wi-deok. Symbolic of his efforts, the church shows evidence of indigenization. The building was built in the Korean architecture of the time, referred to as *hanok*, and the proselyting effort moved toward ordination of Koreans as elders to lead the church.

The building was in the shape of an L, or of the Korean letter ㄱ (the k/g sound), with one wing on the north-south axis of five *kan* (a Korean traditional unit of measurement, defined as being a space of about two meters, or six to eight feet) in size, and the other wing on the east-west axis of three *kan*. Korean indigenization is seen in that the wings separated the men from the women; one wing was where men would sit, and the other wing was where women would sit. This dividing of the congregation by gender is in recognition of the Korean dictum “after age seven, the two sexes do not sit together.” There was even a curtain between them in the area where the two wings joined, at the podium for the speakers.

This separation of the sexes in the churches was seen in later buildings with the men sitting on one side and the women on the other side of a central aisle in the church. The practice continued in many churches into the post-liberation period.

Indigenization efforts were seen in the rapid ordination of new Korean members as church elders and leaders. The egalitarian nature of the Christian movement is also an important feature of





Geumsan Presbyterian Church (left) and its inside

the Geumsan Church, for it did not distinguish between classes, or between rich and poor. There was a separation of genders, but worshippers of all social classes met in one place to learn the Gospel and worship together.

On the property of the church today there is a modern, large chapel. But the church has taken steps to preserve the original building because of its historical importance in the beginnings of the Protestant church movement in Korea.

Ganghwa Anglican Cathedral (Ganghwado Island, Incheon)

The Anglican Church has a headquarters building near City Hall in the center of Seoul, but the first Anglican Church was built on Ganghwado Island. The Seoul Anglican Cathedral was built in 1922, but the Ganghwa Anglican Cathedral was built in 1900.

The interesting thing about the Anglican Cathedral on Ganghwado Island is that it was not a Western building. Like the Geumsan Presbyterian Church, this was a *hanok* building, unlike the other churches that were being built in Seoul, which were mostly built



Ganghwa Anglican Cathedral

in Western styles such as Gothic, Victorian, and Romanesque. This was the first Western church built with Korean architecture. The Anglicans did it again in 1923 on a small island near Ganghwado Island: the Seodo Anglican Cathedral was also built in Korean *hanok* style.

The 1900 cathedral was built by the first bishop of the Anglican Church of Korea for a Korean member who had been baptized as early as 1896. The first Korean Anglican priest was ordained in 1915, and his documentation is preserved in the cathedral. The interior of the church is somewhat Western in its arrangements, but the exterior is clearly Korean, or *hanok*, and is somewhat reminiscent of a Buddhist temple or a Confucian shrine. At any rate, it is clearly a symbol of the desire to indigenize of the Anglican Church.

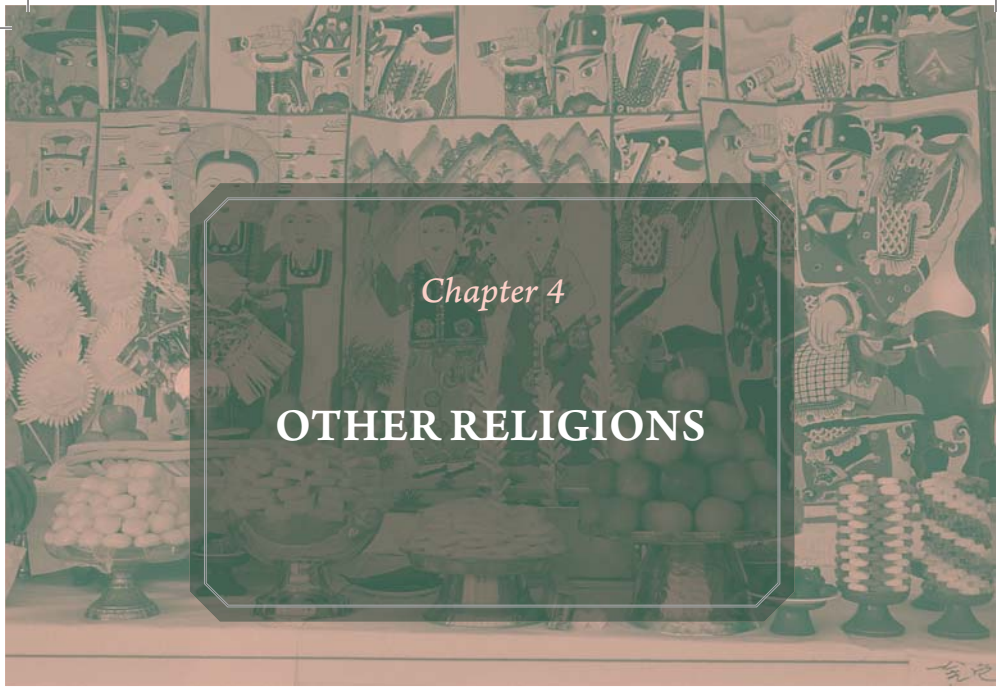
Missionaries from England were among the first to come to

Korea. One reason the Anglicans on Ganghwado Island built *hanok* churches was that the Western-style churches built elsewhere were built of bricks and other materials that were foreign to Korean builders, making it necessary to bring in foreign workmen from the West or China. The Chinese were experts in building with bricks, whereas the Koreans were not. But to build a Korean-style building allowed them to hire local artisans who could easily build the structure to be used as a church.

The history of the Anglican Church is like the other Christian churches that had an early beginning in that they, too, suffered the slowdown and suppression of their work and their growth during the Japanese occupation from 1910 to 1945. But their work progressed after liberation, and in 1965 the first Korean bishop was ordained. It was not, however, until 1993 that the Korean Anglican Church obtained its own governance. Prior to that it was administered directly by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Its theological seminary became the Anglican University (Sungkonghoe University) in 1992. There are about 65,000 Anglicans in Korea today.



Inside of Ganghwa Anglican Cathedral



Chapter 4

OTHER RELIGIONS

Cheondogyo (Donghak)

The most important of Korea's native religions is probably Cheondogyo, the "Religion of the Heavenly Way," originally known as Donghak. Choe Je-u, a man living near Gyeongju in 1860, was aware of Catholicism, which was then called Western Learning. He had direct inspiration from heaven and set forth doctrines that he called Donghak, or Eastern Learning, clearly a response to Catholicism. It was not anti-Catholic, per se. In fact, they incorporated some Western ideas, such as a weekly worship service—therefore Confucianism and Buddhism had commemorated important anniversary dates, but had not yet established weekly services. And they eventually built places for worship that looked very much like Western churches.

Yongdamjeong Pavilion (Gyeongju, Gyeongsangbuk-do)

In a picturesque narrow gorge with a beautiful little waterfall and a pond below the waterfall sits a pavilion that marks the spot where Choe Je-u began to see a new world order, a new beginning.

The core doctrine was *in nae cheon*—man and God are one, or man is god. The religion was egalitarian, in stark contrast to the hierarchy of Confucianism. In traditional Korea under the influence of Confucianism, one's family background was of primary importance. In Donghak, they took on new names that did not have surnames—eschewing all that a family name could mean, implying high status or low status.

The religion ran afoul of the government as soon as it started, and Choe Je-u was arrested and executed—ironically, under the anti-Catholic laws whereby hundreds of Catholics were executed. But the religion did not die with the founder. A distant cousin, Choe Si-hyeong, became the next leader, and mostly while hiding from



Yongdamjeong Pavilion, Gyeongju

the authorities for the next thirty years, he led the religion.

Choe Si-hyeong resisted the faction that wanted to use the religion to tackle social injustice, but finally, in 1894, succumbed and allowed the political elements in the party to take action. Jeon Bong-jun led the Donghak followers to take over government offices at the county level and break into the government granaries that had been set up for disaster relief, general welfare purposes, and to distribute grain to the poor or the unfortunate, but had become a tool for corruption of local magistrates who would use the granaries for self-enrichment. The movement, once ignited, spread like wildfire, and soon the Donghak rebels took over much of the southwest quadrant of Korea.

The suppression of the movement by government forces was not successful, and the government called upon its ally China to send in troops. China had just put down its own neo-religious uprising, the Taiping Rebellion of 1850 to 1864, and it sent troops. The Japanese cited a treaty of 1882 that neither side would send troops without informing the other, and accused China of violating the treaty. Really, it was the excuse that the Japanese militarists were waiting for, and thus Korea was the venue for the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895.

Cheondogyo Central Temple (Seoul)

After the First Sino-Japanese War, Donghak returned to its non-political roots by changing its name, to disassociate itself from the Donghak Peasant Movement, to Cheondogyo, meaning the “Religion of the Heavenly Way.” A new leader, Son Byeong-hui, led the religion through a new era that was capped by one more

political action—the March First Independence Movement. Of the thirty-three signers of the declaration, fifteen were Cheondogyo followers, sixteen were Christian, and two were Buddhist. The Cheondogyo network of churches, as well as the Christian network, was utilized to disseminate copies of the declaration.

The Cheondogyo Central Temple, located in the heart of Seoul near the former palaces of the Joseon kings and across the street from the grand residence of the Heungseon Daewongun, the father of King Gojong, is a church built in Western style reminiscent of the Myeong-dong Cathedral or the Chungdong Methodist Church. Built of brick, like the other churches of the time, at the height of anti-Japanese sentiment in Korea, which culminated in the March First Movement of 1919.

The Central Temple is an impressive structure with a large meeting capacity. In the front of the chapel, where there might be a crucifix in a Christian building, is the symbol of Cheondogyo, a set of circles inside half-circles, a symbol of *in nae cheon*.

Cheondogyo does not have a large membership today. Some estimates say there are around 50,000 followers in South Korea. In North Korea, although religion is proscribed, Cheondogyo survives as a political party—one of the few parties other than the



Cheondogyo Central Temple

Communist, or Workers' Party of Korea. Of course, North Korea sees virtue in the native movement, for, after all, the first peasant revolution in Korea, and in its narrative, the precursor of the twentieth-century Communist movement, was the nineteenth-century Donghak Peasant Movement.

Daejonggyo (Religion of Dangun)

Mt. Manisan (Ganghwado Island, Incheon)

There was a myth, thought to be one of the Goguryeo myths from the northern part of Korea, recorded in *Samguk Yusa* (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms, 1281), but having an oral tradition that predates the compilation in the thirteenth century, that told of a bear that desired to be human and was transformed into a beautiful woman, who then mated with a god and gave birth to Dangun, the



Jesa ceremony being conducted in front of a shrine for Dangun (left), *cheonje* (celestial deity worship ritual) being conducted at Mt. Manisan, Ganghwado Island

first Korean ruler. According to the legend, he ruled for 1,500 years and *spread benefits to the people*—this has become the ideal for good rulers in Korea.

In 1909, a man named Na Cheol started teaching that Dangun had ascended to heaven to become the third of the gods in a triumvirate that ruled the heavens. There was God the Father, the creator of the universe; God the Teacher, who teaches of universal truths; and God the King, the ruler of creation. It was God the Teacher who came to earth and mated with the bear-woman to produce Dangun, who, when he ascended to heaven, became God the King.

The religion had great appeal to those who were learning about the concept of nationhood and nationalism as the Japanese were growing in imperial ambition and about to take over Korea. The rationale then, and to an extent today, was that Korea needed its own native religion. Other religions were imported. Christianity was an import. And, for that matter, so were Buddhism and Confucianism. The *true* religion for Koreans should be an indigenous belief system, and Daejonggyo (the religion of the great ancestor) or Dangunism fit the bill.

The sacred space for Daejonggyo is the altar atop Mt. Manisan, a mountain on Ganghwado Island. There ceremonies are held on the national holiday called Gaecheonjeol, “Opening of Heaven Day” (National Foundation Day), October 3. The actual mountaintop where Dangun was born is in North Korea today, but the site on Ganghwado Island, where it is known that Dangun set up an altar and carried out the ceremonies to heaven (*jecheon* ceremonies), has become the official site for South Koreans.



Na Cheol, after founding the religion in 1909, soon found his movement suppressed by the Japanese when they took over control of the peninsula; therefore, he took refuge in Manchuria. In 1916, with a statement that he had failed to prevent Japan's takeover, he committed suicide in protest. But the religion lives on. A 1995 survey said there were about 10,000 people who adhered to the doctrine.

Won-Buddhism

The Sacred Territory of Iksan (Iksan, Jeollabuk-do)

Won-Buddhism is a new and simplified form of Buddhism. There is no image of the Buddha. The symbol is a circle—that is what *won* means. It implies simplicity and also completeness. There is no requirement to be a monk, but one can if one wants to. A monk can wear the monk's (or female monk's) habit, or not. One can be a celibate monk or a married monk, if one feels called to be a monk. There was a time, when saving money was more important, when the nun's garb included a skirt to the knees, not to the floor. But today's Won-Buddhist monks wear floor-length skirts.

Economy and simplicity are the rule. The founder of Won-Buddhism, Park Chung-bin (1891–1943), could foresee the coming of a materialistic age at the time when he attained enlightenment at age twenty-five. In a society overwhelmed with materialism, religion needed to respond by becoming simpler and accessible to everyone. He declared eight years later, in 1924, the founding of the Society for the Study of the Buddha dharma, based in Iksan, Jeollabuk-do. At the time of his death in 1943, he published his doctrine in *The*



Won-Buddhist altar (left), Daegakjeon Hall at Iksan Sanctuary of Won-Buddhism

Correct Canon of Buddhism. Four years later, the second patriarch, Song Gyu (1900–1962) changed the name to Won-Buddhism, and he published his book of doctrine, *The Scriptures of Won-Buddhism*.

For Won-Buddhism, the worship hall is simple. No images at all. No temple paintings like those so common in other Buddhist temples. At other temples, eventually, the monks will say, you do not need the image or the paintings—they are all expedient means to help you to understand and to reach enlightenment. In Won-Buddhism, you skip that stage, and go straight to the doctrine for understanding since we are now in an age of literacy and enlightenment.

Iksan is the center of Won-buddhism. There remain old buildings where Park Chung-bin and early members of the order used to practice and propagate their religion. Also, Iksan is home to Wonkwang University, which was founded by Won-Buddhism.

Shamanism

In Korea, *musok*, or Shamanism is pervasive. There is not one headquarters or central authority, but rather independent *mudang* or as they prefer, *mansin*, are found practicing in many neighborhoods in every city and rural area in Korea. Unlike the major religions Buddhism, Confucianism, and Christianity—all of which have texts that tell the story of their religion and their founding figures—Shamanism has no text. The practices and ceremonies are passed down through an oral tradition. In spite of that fact, the practices from shaman to shaman and from place to place are remarkably similar.

The sacred place is primarily the home or home/office of the shaman. She—most often the shaman is female—will provide con-

Jeju Island's Songdang-ri Bonhyangdanggut



sultations to those with spiritual or other problems. Often, sessions with the shaman are for obtaining advice and what amounts to fortune telling although shamans are quick to point out that there are *jeomjaengi* who do only fortune telling. The shaman, if the consultation warrants it, may recommend a ceremony called a *gut*. A full-blown *gut* can last three days, but there are abbreviated forms that can last for only an hour or so. In a full *gut*, the client's friends and family often participate and more than one shaman can be called in to assist. The sacred site can be the shaman's home/office or, for the full ceremony, the client's home. Thus, for the purposes of this book, the sacred place is actually many places and is quite ordinary.

The shaman's home or office is often a storefront mixed in with a variety of other offices and homes, but is usually demarcated by a tall bamboo pole affixed near the entrance to the building. Often the bamboo pole is replaced once a year as the green leaves turn brown. Sometimes a plastic, imitation bamboo pole is employed. Often in the upper leaves of the bamboo there are banners or sometimes globes, in the five colors of shamanism—red, green, blue, yellow, and white. The bamboo pole is sometimes described as functioning like a radio antenna, snagging spirits that sail by and bringing them down into the shaman's office.

The shaman's office is often one room, the front room, of the shaman's home. There is room enough on the floor for only three or four clients to sit and consult with the shaman. Dominating one wall of the room, there will be an altar with several images or paintings representing the various spirits or deities that can be prayed to for assistance. There is almost always a Buddhist figure—either



Punggeoje Festival (Rites for Good Fishing)

Gwaneum, the Bodhisatva of Mercy, who is very approachable and a favorite at Buddhist temples as well, or a medicine bodhisatva, or one of the Buddhas: Shakyamuni, Amitabha, or Vairocana. There is almost always a representation of the mountain god (*sansin*). And frequently, there is a grandmother figure and sometimes children deities. The central figure in many shaman altars is *daegam*—the great official. Since earthly life is known to be bureaucratic, with corrupt officials blocking access to goods and services, and where a powerful friend in high places can help you get things done, similarly, the heavens are bureaucratic, so it is a great advantage to have a *daegam* who can negotiate access to high deities and get past the demons and troublesome spirits.

There are other shamanistic sites besides the shaman's quarters. Sites of great natural beauty and wonder are often co-opted by

shamanistic practitioners. For example, in a village, a great tree will often be decorated with shamanistic prayers written on strips of paper tied onto its branches. A powerful rock commands similar respect. Tombs of former kings and ancient dolmens are also places that will attract shaman worship. There tend to be clusters of shaman worship sites near powerfully spiritual places, such as near Tumuli Park in Gyeongju where there is a large cluster of tombs of Silla kings. The northwest section of Seoul, along the hill known as Mt. Inwangsan, has a large collection of shaman offices and homes. These clusters of shaman sites are convenient when shamans need to call in other shamans for major ceremonies—shamans tend to be more cooperative than competitive in serving their clients.

Islam

Seoul Central Masjid (Seoul)

Of the three Abrahamic traditions, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, only Christianity has succeeded on a large scale in Korea. Judaism has been practiced on the American military bases, but now is also practiced in a synagogue in Seoul, with such observances as Passover and other Jewish rites.

At the outset, in an effort to find a home for Islam in Korea, when the mosque was built in the mid-1970s, Korea found that one of its prominent lineage groups, the Indong Jang lineage, had a genealogical document that stated that the founding ancestor of the clan was an immigrant from China during the Yuan Dynasty era, and he was listed as having been a Muslim. The Jang family, long since having



Seoul Central Masjid

lost any practice of Islam, was invited to revive its family heritage and come to the mosque to worship there. As loyal Koreans, they obeyed the call and attended the mosque, but the participation, as one can imagine, was awkward and imprecise. Now, with over one million guest workers in Korea, many of whom are from Muslim countries, the mosque provides a real service. In addition to worship, the mosque provides assistance to guest workers in cases involving labor disputes and worksite injury compensation and treatment. There are Korean social workers who work with the mosque officials to help the foreign workers, particularly those who may be in disputes with their employers.

Since the Seoul Masjid was built, fourteen more mosques have been established all over the country.

AFTERWORD

We have looked at the important historical religious sites in Korea. We have left many out, unavoidably. There are many more that visitors can discover on their own. Herein we have tried to find the oldest and the first in the wide range of religions in Korea. We hope you enjoy your journey as you visit these and still other sites of sacred experience in Korea.

About the author

Mark Peterson is a professor of Korean studies at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. He received his Ph.D. in East Asian Languages and Civilizations from Harvard University. He lived in Korea for over fifteen years, serving seven of those years as the Director of the Korea Fulbright Program. His published works include *Korean Adoption and Inheritance: Case Studies in the Creation of a Classic Confucian Society*, *A Brief History of Korea* (published by Facts-on-File, New York), and *Yugyo sahoe ui ch'angch'ul* (The emergence of Confucian society). He previously served as chair of the Committee on Korean Studies of the Association for Asian Studies and is currently the editor-in-chief of the *Korea Journal*.

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